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DEFENDING DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ
Naomi Klein

KERRY'S TRADE WINDS
Tom Hayden & Lori M. Wallach

EXILE'S RETURN
Amitava Kumar

A WORLD NEGLECTED

THE FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE WE SHOULD BE HAVING

by SHERLE R. SCHWENNINGER

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LETTERS

Letters

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

POVERTY IN WORLD'S RICHEST NATION

Washington, DC

■ I have recently traveled to some of the poorest, most isolated rural areas of the United States, where poverty rates are highest. Peter Dreier ["Poverty in the Suburbs," Sept. 20], and most Americans, would find it difficult to imagine the extent of poverty and the effect it has on children. There are places where children can't read in school because they have no glasses, can't drink the water because it's contaminated and can't get to a doctor because they have no transportation. In parts of Appalachia, less than one-third of adults have graduated from high school and less than 6 percent have a college degree. In New Mexico the per capita annual income in the Navajo Nation is $4,106, and for every 100 Indian children entering kindergarten, only seven will go on to college. With greater investments in programs that focus on literacy and other basic skills, we could help these children become American success stories rather than sad statistics.

MARK K. SHRIVER
Save the Children

CALIFORNIA LEADS THE WAY

Santa Monica, Calif.

■ I'm glad to hear that state governors have awakened to the threat of globalization [John Nichols, "Global Fights Go Local," Aug. 30/Sept. 6], but the battle was engaged on a far more local level, far sooner. Our City Council passed a resolution against the extension of NAFTA to the Free Trade Area of the Americas more than three years ago. We did so because such globalization treaties put undue pressure on states and localities to remove their standards and laws that protect public health and safety, the environment and workers' rights. As long as Washington, DC, is corporate-controlled territory, it will be up to local government to defend quality-of-life issues.

KEVIN MCKEOWN
Mayor pro tem

LETTER FROM A MARINE

■ I'm the Marine who wrote the August 23 *New York Times* op-ed "Over Najaf, Fighting for Des Moines," which Naomi Klein cites in her "Lookout" column, titled "Bring Najaf to New York" [Sept. 13]. I respect the right of every person to express their own opinion, but Klein's article has many falsehoods and is misleading to the point that it demands attention.

Klein evokes the stereotypical "baby killer" myth when she states that "every day, children are killed in their homes as US soldiers inflict collective punishment on the holy city; every day, more bodies are disturbed as US Marines stomp through the Valley of Peace cemetery, their boots slipping into graves as they use tombstones for cover." First, children were not killed in their homes by US soldiers; most of the local residents fled town once the hostilities commenced, and we Americans only fire on known enemy positions.

Second, fighting in the cemetery was not something we wanted to do, but after the militia attacked Najaf police stations, they fled to their weapons stockpiles in the cemetery and left us little choice. Every possible measure to minimize damage was taken, including those that put American lives in jeopardy (such as withholding fire because of concerns about the proximity of enemy mortar positions and strongholds close to the Imam Ali Shrine and civilian buildings).

Klein later states, "It's not just that sacred burial sites are being desecrated with fresh blood; it's that Americans appear unaware of the depths of this offense." No one is more aware of the complexities of fighting on the Shiites' holy grounds than this culturally sensitive military I'm serving with in Najaf. Klein said that in my article I "bragged" about knowing "a bit about the caliph, about the five pillars and about Allah." I was not bragging, I was explaining that I, like most of my fellow Marines in Iraq, have studied a little about this country and culture in an attempt to avoid some of the pitfalls novelist Tim O'Brien describes about his time in Vietnam, as you cited—what he described as a "memory of ignorance, and I mean utter ignorance." Klein identifies O'Brien's remorse as "humility" and my honesty as "cockiness," conveniently failing to mention that when briefly describing my limited understanding of the Islamic religion and Iraqi culture, I also stated that "I know that I don't know enough."

My "blithe dismissal" of the enemy as foreign fighters and ex-Baathists was anything but; I should not be so fortunate as to dismiss those who would kill me, nor will I mistake their identity. Klein is apparently well versed in Mahdi Army goals and structure, since she said, "the Mahdi Army that Butler is attacking is made up of Iraqi citizens, not foreigners.... they are enraged that they still lack electricity and sewage treatment despite the billions pledged for reconstruction."

I cannot vouch for the membership criteria to join Sadr's gang, but there are indeed hundreds—if not thousands—of foreign fighters here in Iraq, and in Najaf. The Iranian influence is unmistakable, evident in captured documents and equipment, in communications and personnel. Jihadists from all over this region have flocked to the conflict like moths to a flame. I wish I were wrong on this, but it is the truth.

The "rage" Klein says Sadr's militia feels for Iraq's lack of infrastructure improvement is clearly overshadowed by their desire to kill Americans and use violence to suit their selfish needs and quest for power. In fact, the only reason US reconstruction money has not been more effective is because of groups like the Mahdi militia, which endanger prospective workers, kill civilian contractors and threaten the security of those who wish to help rebuild.

This leads to my next point, which regards Klein's statement that Sadr's followers' "opposition to the occupation represents the overwhelmingly mainstream sentiment in Iraq." This is simply false. From my inside perspective, I believe the vast majority of Iraqis do indeed want Americans to leave their country, but not before we help make it safe and assist them in getting to a sense of peaceful normalcy. An Iraqi soldier I ate lunch next to the other day shook my hand repeatedly after eating, then touched his heart and said, "Thank you" and "May God bless you." This kind individual was no American puppet: He was a hard-working, decent native who is grateful for our country's assistance, is anxious to suppress the terrorist threat here and represents the majority of his people.

In Najaf, most locals blamed the militia for the violence and destruction during the conflict. They are grateful we were fighting the thugs who'd hijacked their town and their shrine, and they wanted the Iraqi government to act sooner and more decisively against Sadr. The Imam Ali Shrine is a major source of income in Najaf. Hotels, shops and restaurants all depend upon the income from those who journey to this sacred location to bury their dead or pay their respects. Sadr hijacked their primary source of income and established illegal checkpoints around the cemetery for the express purpose of intimidating locals and extorting money from grieving Muslims who only wished to bury their dead in peace. Sadr had his clerical status revoked by Grand Ayatollah al-Ha'eri of Iran (his mentor) for his thuggery and disregard for the Koran and for orchestrating the killing of a fellow cleric.

Finally, Klein's comments that Sadr was peaceful until the US military "[fired] on their demonstrations and [bombed] their neighborhoods" is another misleading statement. Klein paints US armed forces as "attackers" and "occupiers" and those trying to kill us as "insurgents" or even "defenders." This is a slap in the face to those of us in uniform. What, specifically, are the militias and criminal elements defending? And what are we attacking? Roadside bombs; kidnapped journalists; weapons caches in schools, hospitals and mosques; mortars in neighborhoods; decapitations of civilian contractors; ambushed construction workers; blown-up police stations; sabotaged oil pipelines and power grids: These are the tools of

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EDITORIALS

Cheney's Cronies

As he prepares to debate Halliburton CEO turned Vice President Dick Cheney, Senator John Edwards would do well to study up on his Harry Truman. The buck-stops-here President had a word for war profiteering: "treason." He had another word for those political and business leaders who condone "waste, inefficiency, mismanagement and profiteering" during a time of war: "unpatriotic." If John Kerry's running mate wants to have a greater impact in his debate with the Vice President—which follows hard on the first presidential debate—than did the woefully inept Joe Lieberman when he faced Cheney in 2000, Edwards has to drop the faux friendliness of the Washington elites whom Truman so disdained in favor of blunt talk about Cheney, starting with his Halliburton connections.

Halliburton has been experiencing a growth spurt ever since Cheney passed through the revolving door of Washington politics to set up the Administration he manages for George W. Bush. The Texas-based corporation moved to number one on the Army's list of top contractors in 2003, pocketing 4.2 billion taxpayer dollars last year alone. It got one no-bid contract after discussions in which Cheney's chief of staff, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, was involved. (Despite soaring revenues, however, the Halliburton unit doing work in Iraq is plagued by so many problems, from mismanagement to allegations of corruption, that it may be spun off to try to salvage what's left of the parent company's reputation.)

If Edwards brings Halliburton up during his Tuesday night face-off with Cheney in Cleveland, the Vice President will undoubtedly claim—as he has whenever he's been challenged—that he no longer has any connection with Halliburton. Edwards can counter with another of those blunt Trumanisms: "liar." The Vice President continues to receive money from Halliburton—$178,437 in 2003 alone—and a Congressional Research Service study has described the sort of deferred-salary payments he receives and the millions in stock options he retains as "among those benefits described by the Office of Government Ethics as 'retained ties' or 'linkages' to one's former employer." In other words, Cheney has a great big conflict of interest, and pounding away on it will go a long way toward exposing the crony capitalism that has been a hallmark of the Bush Administration.

Edwards should talk about all the other troubling aspects of Cheney's tenure, too. As *Nation* Washington correspondent John Nichols explains in his new book, *Dick: The Man Who Is President* (New Press), most of the pathologies of the Bush Administration can be traced back to Cheney, who chaired the corrupt Energy Task Force and pressed Bush to make a second round of tax cuts for the rich, which then–Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill worried were unwise and unsound.

This is the armchair warrior who as a college student collected five draft deferments to avoid serving in Vietnam but who entered the White House campaigning for war on Iraq and never let up. Since the September 11 attacks, and with increasing ferocity during the current campaign, Cheney has served as Bush's scaremonger in chief—evoking images of thousands of Americans killed by terrorists with nuclear weapons and seeking to justify the invasion of Iraq by repeating thoroughly discredited claims that Saddam Hussein's regime was working with Al Qaeda.

By making a link in the minds of voters between the excesses of Halliburton and the deteriorating situation in Iraq, Edwards can help refocus the campaign on the questions that matter. Among them: Which presidential team can be trusted to put the needs of Americans before their own interests and those of their friends? Cheney has made it clear where his loyalties lie.

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COMMENT

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Nader, Unbowed

ELECTION MATTERS

The thing that really galls Ralph Nader is not that so many of his prominent 2000 campaign supporters are now actively campaigning for Democrat John Kerry. To be sure, he is angry about the abandonment. But what gets him so fevered that he starts accusing old comrades of engaging in "the most amazing unconditional surrender by the left in decades" is his belief that they have given their support to the Kerry campaign without asking anything in return. "They made no demands," Nader says of the dozens of his former backers who recently signed a letter urging support for Kerry. "They forgot the wisdom of Frederick Douglass, who taught us that power concedes nothing without a demand."

Certainly, the defections of Studs Terkel, Barbara Ehrenreich, Bonnie Raitt, Tim Robbins, Noam Chomsky and others whom Nader refers to as "the finest people on the left" has knocked a little more wind out of the independent candidate's wheezing 2004 campaign. But Nader seems to be at least as concerned that the endorsements are doing so little to buck up Kerry's campaign. "If the left does not exert pressure on Kerry, the only pull he is going to feel will be from corporate interests," he says, dismissing "Anybody But Bush" sentiments as intellectually and politically vapid. "If the left does not make Kerry better, he gets worse. He moves to the right. And when Kerry moves to the right, his poll numbers go down. So, you see, when liberals back Kerry without asking anything of him, they don't do him any favors. That's why he's losing what should have been an easy race."

While Nader may find some takers for that point of view, he steps onto shakier ground when he suggests that "the only force pulling Kerry in a progressive direction is our ticket." As of now, the Nader campaign does not appear to be much of a force. Running in 2000 on the Green ticket, Nader won nearly 3 million votes—2.7 percent of the national total—and secured more than 5 percent of the vote in ten states and DC. This year, after causing a brief stir when spring polls suggested his anti–Iraq war stance was resonating, Nader's poll numbers have dwindled nationally and in most, though not all, battleground states. And he has yet to mount a campaign anywhere to match his 2000 effort.

Nader has made stops in all fifty states, but for the most part his travels have resembled a lecture tour rather than a presidential run. During late September visits to cities that in 2000 were hotbeds of Nader activism—San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis and college towns like Madison, Wisconsin, and Iowa City, Iowa—I was struck by a complete absence of the street-level campaigning that was such a vibrant characteristic of Nader's last campaign. In 2000, when Nader portrayed his Green Party run as an effort to build a genuine alternative to the two major parties, it was impossible to set foot in any of those communities without encountering undergraduates tabling for Nader, older lefties arguing fervently that the time had come to build a Green alternative, and mainstream liberals raising the ubiquitous "Let Ralph Debate" call. This year, a visitor could pass through without hearing mention of Nader's name by anyone other than angry Democrats who still blame him for tipping the balance to Bush in Florida in 2000—a

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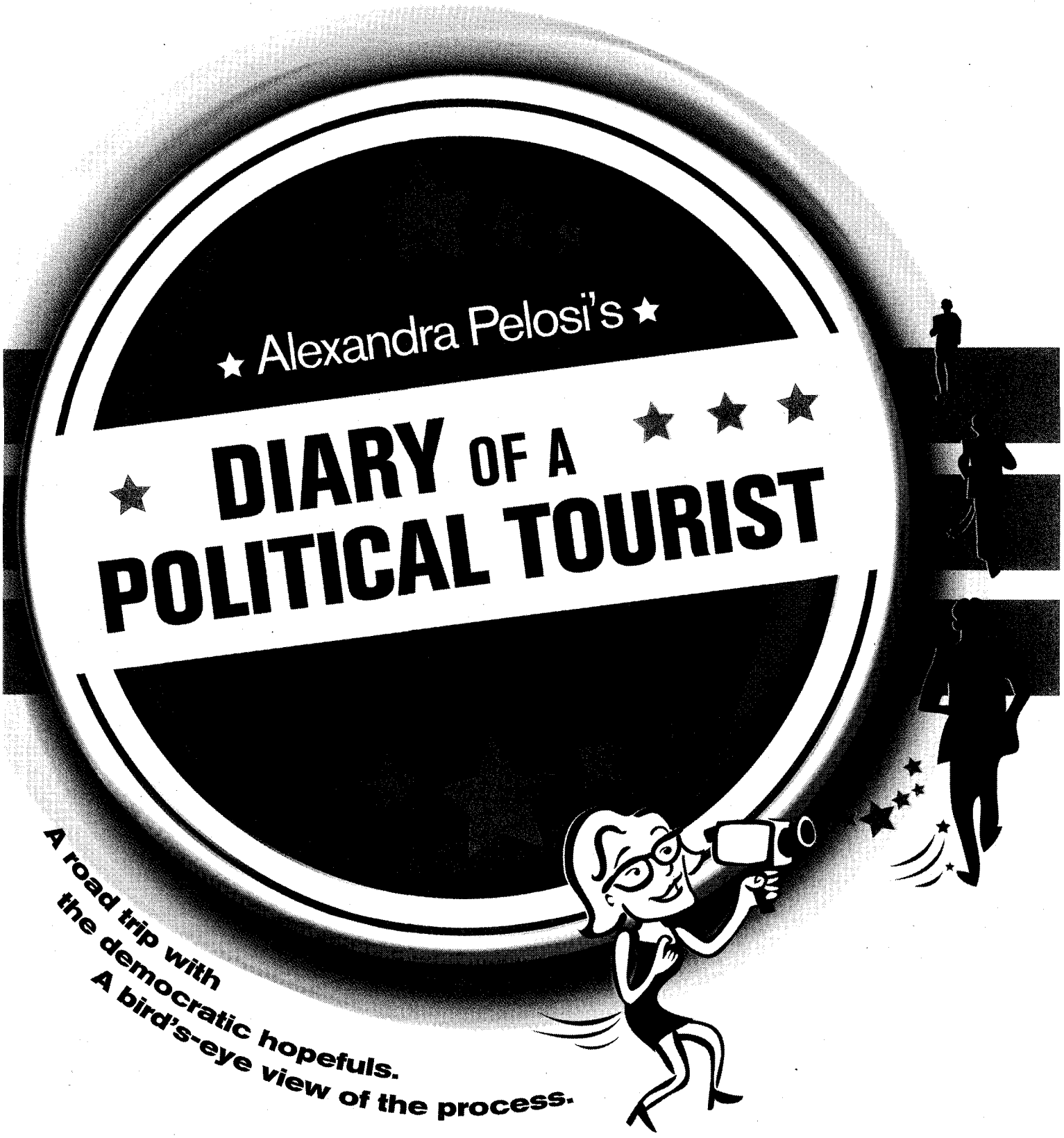

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COMMENT

charge Nader disputes—and who spend inordinate amounts of time assessing his prospects as a spoiler in this year's race.

"There isn't a campaign to speak of," says Ross Mirkarimi, the San Francisco Green Party strategist who was one of the ablest organizers for the 2000 Green effort. Unlike 2000, says Arab American Institute chief James Zogby, Nader is "having trouble establishing himself as a legitimate candidate." While Nader complains a great deal about his abandonment by the "liberal elites," the real abandonment appears to be at the grassroots. "Most of the people who backed Nader in 2000 recognize that this year the election is about getting rid of George W. Bush," says David Austin, a savvy Wisconsin political activist who backed Nader in 2000 but now places himself firmly in the Anybody But Bush camp. That has made it cool—or at least acceptable—to back Kerry in places where backing Gore in 2000 was anything but hip.

Even if more progressives were open to accepting Nader's claim that he is the anticorporate, antiwar alternative, he is having a hard time making that case. Instead, Nader's spring, summer and, now, fall have been taken up with bitter and seemingly endless ballot-access fights. After he lost the support of the Green Party in late June, in part because of the disregard that his campaign showed for the activists who built the base for his 1996 and 2000 campaigns, Nader found himself locked in a state-by-state battle for ballot lines that would have been his for the taking as the Green nominee. Nader's campaign has been forced to hire paid signature gatherers in a number of states and to shell out huge sums to fend off constant and frequently picayune legal challenges to its petitions. "This is the biggest assault on an independent candidate's right to get on the ballot in memory," he says. "They're using Jim Crow ballot-access laws to stifle political dissent."

Teams of lawyers with ties to the Democratic Party and labor unions allied with Kerry have gone to war to block Nader's access to ballots. And some Democratic officials have made what look to many like partisan calls to remove Nader's name from ballots even where his backers have filed what traditionally would have been sufficient documentation. But for the most part, the Democrats are not apologizing. They say they are only holding Nader to the letter of the law—something he taught some of them to do—and they argue that, in the high-stakes world of presidential politics, they are not about to cut any breaks to the man they blame for costing them the presidency in 2000.

Nader's campaign, ill prepared for the intensity of the struggle and desperate to leap the ballot-access hurdles, accepted contributions from major Republican givers such as billionaire Richard Egan, the former ambassador to Ireland, and his wife, Pamela, who have raised more than $600,000 for Bush, and on-the-ground assistance from conservative groups like the Oregon Family Council and Oregon Citizens for a Sound Economy, which urged Bush backers to help Nader get on the ballot in that state. Nader dismisses charges that his campaign is powered by Republican money and foot soldiers, noting a recent Center for Responsive Politics study that says only 4 percent of the funding for his cash-strapped campaign has come from GOP-tied sources. "Don't you think that if the Republicans, with all their resources, really wanted me on the ballot in every state that I would be on the ballot in every state?" he asks. But even an arm's-length dalliance with the right in states such as Oregon has given ammunition to opponents, who now portray him as a willing accomplice to the Bush/Cheney campaign.

Nader's foes are using that ammunition to justify attempts to knock him off ballots. By late September, the Nader campaign had staked a claim to ballot lines in at least thirty-three states, with lawsuits pending to put him on in seven more states. The long, expensive technical fights over petition formats and signature validity will go on in some states through the election.

Nader and his aides admit their campaign has been "distracted" by these ballot-access battles, evidence of which can be seen in the muted cry for the inclusion of the independent candidate in this year's presidential debates. Make no mistake, Nader wants in, but it is hard to demand inclusion when you are still struggling to gain the ballot placement that confirms at least one form of electoral legitimacy. As frustrating as the ballot-access fights are, Nader gamely declares, "Democracy is not a bad issue to run on."

In practice, however, Nader's crusade for democracy often degenerates into carping about Democrats. Rare is the conversation in which Nader fails to use the term "totally bankrupt" in reference to the Democrats. He is quick to detail the sins of Democratic Na-

CALVIN TRILLIN

WHY THE REPUBLICANS MIGHT BE RIGHT THAT OSAMA BIN LADEN IS ROOTING FOR JOHN KERRY

Bin Laden is the name I bear,
And, modestly, I think it's fair
To say it's thought by spies and cops
Among all terrorists I'm tops.
And therefore it's a crying shame
This fellow Bush won't say my name.

At first he said it, like a curse:
He said that I'd be caught, or worse.
But when I vanished, his refrain
Became about Saddam Hussein.
Well, jihad's nice, but so's acclaim.
This fellow Bush won't say my name.

If Kerry wins, it's true that he
May concentrate his troops on me.
It's true that Bush's weird pursuits
Are means for me to get recruits.
But still, I must reclaim my fame.
This fellow Bush won't say my name.

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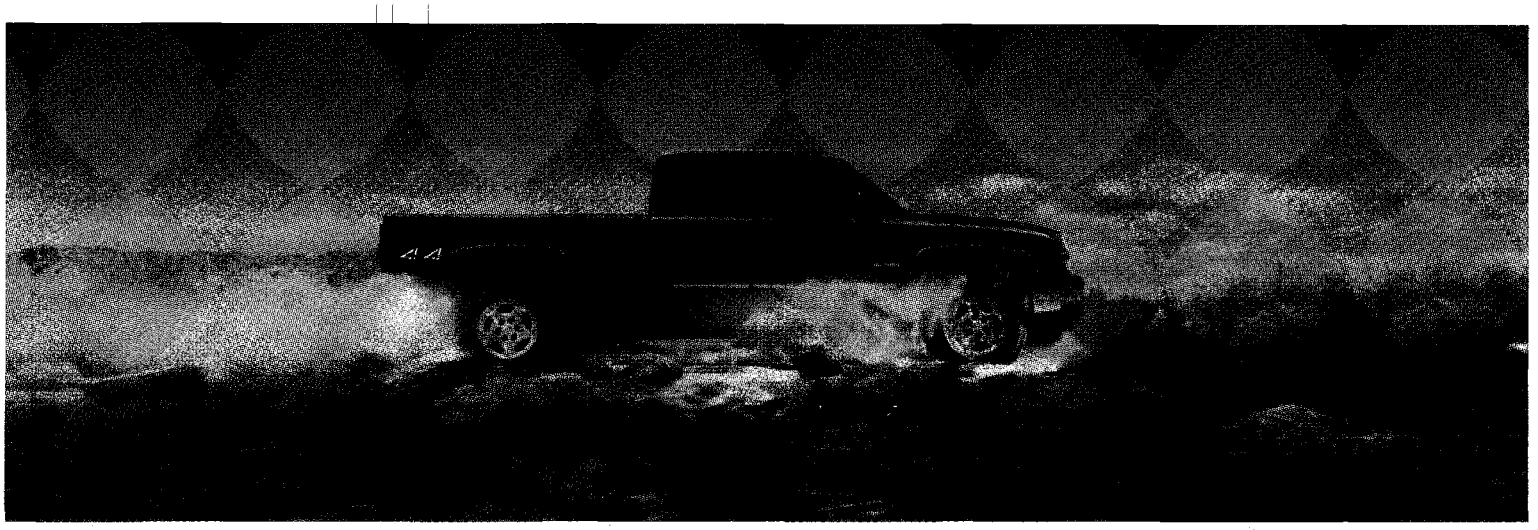

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COMMENT

tional Committee chair Terry McAuliffe and to recite what he sees as the failures of John Kerry and John Edwards—the latter earning particular scorn as a trial lawyer who has failed to challenge the attacks by Bush/Cheney "on the pillar of our democracy, the right of citizens to have a day in court."

As the election approaches, those criticisms of the Democrats will be heard a good deal in battleground states because of a bonehead strategy of the Democrats. When they got Nader tossed off the ballots in noncompetitive states such as Illinois and Texas—where he would have spent most of his time banging Bush—they in effect guided him into states where polls show the Bush/Kerry race so close that even a marginal Nader vote could do damage. Instead of knocking Nader out, Democrats have drawn him into places where they least want him to be. Now, he is turning up regularly in the competitive states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Florida and Pennsylvania.

Nader still says that he is more likely to hurt Bush than Kerry. But polls from battleground states—where Nader's 1, 2 and 3 percent support figures often mirror the margin by which Bush leads Kerry—frequently suggest otherwise. Nader likes to say that "the first step in recovering power is the realization that you don't have any." This fall, Nader could yet prove himself both right and wrong. While he does not seem to have the power to give Kerry a needed nudge to the left, he could yet have the power to pull just enough votes away from Kerry to tip several battleground states to the right. It is the fear of precisely such a result—as opposed to any loosening of left-wing faith, or fatal attraction to John Kerry—that has led so many of Nader's old allies to abandon him.

JOHN NICHOLS

Death on the Border

Tucson

Now that a summerlong Homeland Security crackdown along the Arizona border is concluding, the results are in and they spell lethal failure. Since the fiscal year began last October 1, the statewide toll has reached a record 164 migrants perishing while trying to cross into the United States.

Already in August, when I headed out with US Border Patrol search and rescue specialist Jim Chism on his daily routine an hour southwest of here, he could sense that this "season of death" was going to be as grim as ever. "No one should have to die for entering the United States without papers. It shouldn't be the death penalty," he said as we followed the trail of a group of migrants through a jumble of lava-hot volcanic rock, mesquite, greasewood and cat's-claw brush in triple-digit heat. Chism feared the group we were following was lost and facing dehydration and sunstroke. "Looks like a group of seven," he said, intensely studying the foot tracks. "In this heat you can only carry enough water for thirty-five to forty miles, then you start drinking out of ponds, contaminated irrigation water and finally your own urine. And then you die." We never found the group, who may have been a day ahead of us.

Agent Chism was but one piece of the Bush Administration's much-ballyhooed $25 million–plus Arizona Border Control (ABC) operation, which began in March and which was supposed to curb the flow of undocumented aliens and save the lives of desperate desert-crossers. The Border Patrol had been praising the program as effective and consistently reporting a decline in deaths until local reporters—led by the *Arizona Republic*—learned that the government had changed its accounting methods to downplay fatalities; they compiled their own independent count. The Border Patrol acknowledged it was accurate. The ABC initiative included the deployment of scores of additional Border Patrol agents, Black Hawk helicopters and even aerial drones to try to stem the flow. A $13 million program to repatriate apprehended crossers deep within Mexico on two daily flights was aimed at reducing repeat-crossers and lowering the death count.

But the lessons of the past decade, which saw nearly 3,000 people die trying to cross, still apply: Tamp down the border in one place and it balloons in another. This past summer as Border Patrol agents squeezed the gap on the central Arizona border, more migrants crossed to the east and west through even more treacherous terrain. Not only is the death count up, but when the final tallies are in, the total number of apprehensions along the entire length of the southern border will remain unchanged from the last few years—about a million. An equal number, maybe two or three times that, will have slipped through. "What we have continues to be a fatally flawed policy," says Tucson-based Rev. Robin Hoover, organizer of the Humane Borders project, whose members distribute water to migrants near the deadliest crossings. "The crossings and the deaths continue. In a post-9/11 period where Homeland Security is supposed to be paying attention, it seems that the only way to achieve real security would be to get serious about a comprehensive legalization and reform program."

Few in Washington seem ready for such reform. George W. Bush briefly raised hopes for liberalization this past January, when he proposed a guest-worker program. But protests from the restrictionist right led directly to a White House back-down. Arizona Senator John McCain had been championing a bill, supported by Democrats, that would have moved toward legalization of some agricultural workers, but the GOP Congressional leadership also sandbagged that measure. John Kerry has promised, if elected, an "earned legalization" program in his first 100 days. Kerry, however, would most likely be working with substantially the same Congress, and the previous Democratic White House, it should be noted, is responsible for creating and implementing the current disastrous border policy. The only two active measures on immigration are, unfortunately, going in the wrong direction. The Department of Homeland Security recently issued "expedited removal" authority to its Border Patrol agents, allowing them to summarily deport non-Mexican detainees without a hearing. And nativist forces in Arizona have placed Proposition 200 on the November ballot, which requires state agencies to

(Continued on Page 26)

ON THE WEB On October 1 e-Bay will feature an unusual auction of anti-Bush signs made by well-known musicians, with all the proceeds going to the nonprofit, get-out-the-vote group Music for America. Read Hillary Frey's report, and other web exclusives, at www.thenation.com.

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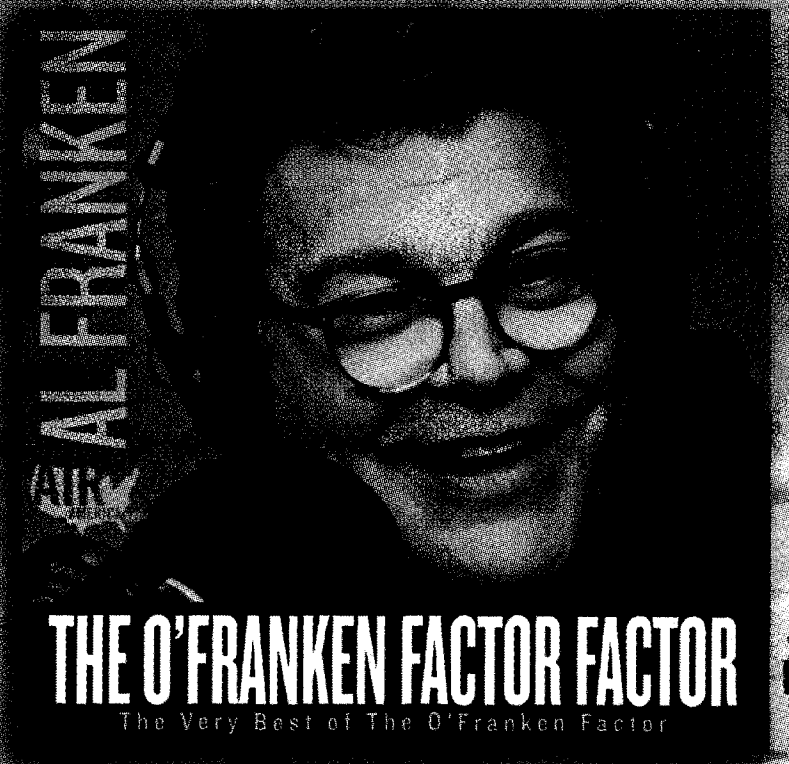

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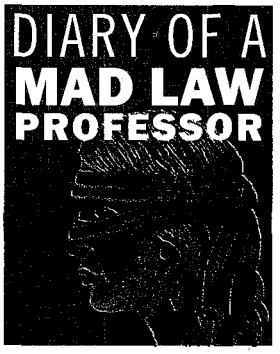
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Wonderland



It is exasperating listening to the news as we approach this most important election. The coverage is all about comparing the length of the candidate's sentences. How many big words do they use? Who's on Leno or Letterman? Whose jaw is more like Richard Nixon's, rather than whose deceptions... In resolving these pressing issues, cameras are breathlessly focused upon the inscrutable thought processes of the latest pollster chimera, the Republican-leaning, formerly staunchly Democratic blue-collar "security mom." Since she is a statistically average but politically swinging kind of girl, she is a much sought-after media date. Journalists are stationed in coffee shops and Wal-Marts across America hoping to flush her out and capture her angst about which man is manly enough to guarantee her children a place on the planet. The three-second soundbites, alas, always make her sound like Olive Oyl trying to decide between Brutus and Popeye.

There is no such angst beyond our borders. With near unanimity, newspapers around the world—even the most conservative end of the British press—are wondering what is going on in the inscrutable thought processes of Donald Rumsfeld. The elections in Iraq may be "not quite perfect," he says; it wouldn't matter to him if parts of that country were not included because of the ongoing violence. Indeed, opines Rumsfeld, some American cities are as dangerous as some parts of Iraq, and hell, we carry on with our elections.

While we are left to surmise, with some apprehension, which American cities are so dangerously imperfect as to risk being left behind, the international media ponder the upside-down, if sunny-side-up priorities in George W. Bush's speech to the United Nations. They worry about the doctrine of pre-emptive warfare as a dangerous model and legally unprecedented global standard. They focus on the ideological inconsistencies behind American neoconservatives' endorsement of "freedom" without stability in Iraq, of "justice" without regard for conventions against torture and of "democracy" without human rights.

It is fascinating to skim the headlines of the world's press. I recommend it—anyone can do it, just go online, where you can get English-language versions of most major papers. One gets an ominous sense of our media searching for a Monica/OJ moment with which it can spin a little sensation, while the rest of the world, feeling its own future hanging in the balance, wrings its hands in despair at the dereliction.

A month or so ago, I was in rural France, visiting some old friends who have moved there. I went to a store that is the French equivalent of Circuit City to see if I could infuse my son's hippity-hop inclined brain with a few foreign-language computer games. As I stood before a wall of offerings trying to decide, I asked the opinion of a fellow shopper, a young French boy, 12 years of age. He promptly handed me the French version of Medal of Honor—"*C'est super!*" he crowed. When I groaned, we fell into conversation about why I didn't want to give my son war games. When he discovered I was American, he said that yes, he could understand—war was "more than a computer game" in America. Then he volunteered that he loved all things American, but he wouldn't want to go there. Too dangerous. Besides, his parents wouldn't want him traveling someplace where human life was "valued so little." Guns, he said. The murder rate. "And you execute children, don't you?"

We talked some more. He was from Nantes, and when he discovered I was born in Boston, he asked, "Where Mr. Kerry is from?"

"That's right," I said, impressed—and was more impressed yet when he observed that Kerry's foreign policy was very close to "that of Mr. Clinton, no?" and then went on to compare them in some detail.

I've thought a lot about that conversation since. Perhaps he was an exceptional child, but I don't think so. In my limited travel experience (to Western Europe, South Africa, Canada and Australia) almost anyone I run into has a better sense of our political system and its carryings-on than any given audience member of *The Tonight Show*. What struck me with great force as I chatted with that boy was the way our media keep saying that Kerry "hasn't defined himself." Yet here was a random kid in a random shopping mall in suburban western France who could define Kerry—and Bush for that matter—better than some American news anchors.

From this perspective, therefore, the problem seems less Kerry's ability to communicate—in however many dense sentences or in whatever idiom—than how much of what he says is actually being conveyed to the American public. Why, I wonder, is our political life so marginal to daily life and to average citizens? Why is our educational system so dismal, our civic discourse so diminished, that schoolkids abroad sound as though they have better-informed opinions about our wars than the "security moms" whose sons are marching off to fight them?

We remain so obsessed with who is more "commanding"—in an adjectival sense, as though command were an aura or an aftershave. Where is any analysis of the actual chain of what has been commanded—in a verbal sense, in the sense of a path that tracks the recent history of real directives, real executive orders? Who commanded what part of the trajectory that has led us not just into an unnecessary and illegal war but from an all-time high of prosperity and surplus to an all-time low of debt, deficit and domestic divisiveness?

A few days after that trip to the CD store, I went to Euro-Disney with my son. It's an odd place, this Disneyfied world on the edge of Paris. We'd been before, about five years ago, but that was before they had soldiers pacing around the gates. This time there were big men in army uniforms carrying very big machine guns. It was odd and alarming and sad, this sight of soldiers guarding the ultimate Fantasyland and symbol of American innocence—as though Cinderella's castle and Alice in Wonderland were under house arrest. ■

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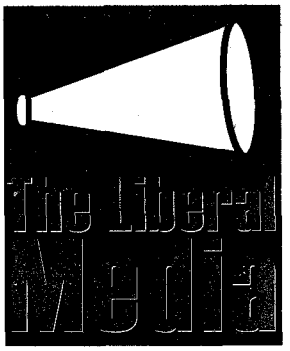
ERIC ALTERMAN

Dumb and Dumber (and Dumber Still)



One problem with trying to write critically about this year's election coverage is that by choosing any single aspect of its manifold failures, one automatically does an injustice to the full scope of its immense, almost stupefying awfulness. When I wrote *What Liberal Media?* I could not have imagined more irresponsible coverage than the "Gore's a liar, Bush is a dope"–athon to which we were treated in 2000. But given that most of the mainstream media have been performing like trained seals in a Karl Rove–produced traveling circus, Sam and Cokie's giggling about an Al Gore grimace on *This Week* four years ago would be the equivalent of Pericles' funeral oration today.

Consider the saturation coverage of the Dan Rather/CBS documents mishap. The network made a stupid mistake in rushing to broadcast a story about Bush's refusal to complete his National Guard training. They compounded the error by serving as a go-between for a source and the Kerry campaign. It was inexcusably bad journalism and everyone involved ought to be suitably embarrassed, and a few—including possibly Rather—disciplined and dismissed. After attempting to defend the story unsuccessfully for a while, CBS relented, apologized and appointed a surprisingly hostile Republican-led investigative team.

Now look at the *Alice in Wonderland* discourse the CBS screw-up has inspired, along with the assumptions that underlie it.

Worse Than War: When the *New York Times* ran its May 26 admission that it gullibly swallowed the Bush Administration's deception about Iraq's nuclear weapons program, which helped win support for a ruinous war, the story was, according to the invaluable *Media Matters*, reported thirty-eight times in US newspaper and wire reports during the following forty-eight hours and seven times on cable news. It was entirely ignored on Fox News Channel. By contrast, in the forty-eight hours following CBS's admission that it "should not have used" memos critical of Bush's military service because of questions regarding their provenance, the story was reported 167 times in US newspaper and wire reports and fifty-seven times on cable news broadcasts. Every single Fox News Channel program devoted itself to the story.

Lectures From a Traitor. Robert Novak convulsed the world of journalism recently when, alone among six selected journalists, he played patsy for the Administration's dirty tricks and willingly blew the cover of a CIA agent in order to discredit her husband. Novak—who once told me he "admired" Elliott Abrams for lying to him in the service of a conservative cause—then helped to erode the profession's First Amendment protections and encourage the courts to threaten other journalists with jail rather than give up the source of his black-bag operation. (Novak has not personally been threatened with jail time, which leads many to conclude that he may secretly be cooperating with the authorities.) And yet this right-wing warrior, employed by CNN and carried faithfully by the *Washington Post*, felt no compunction about demanding on *Capital Gang* that Rather reveal his sources. "I'd like CBS, at this point, to say where they got these documents from," he exclaimed to his co-panelists, not one of whom called him on his hypocrisy.

"I'll Do the Lying Around Here, Punk." *Times* columnist William Safire has played a powerful role in misinforming the paper's readers about a meeting he alleges took place between Al Qaeda terrorist Mohamed Atta and the former head of the Iraqi Intelligence Service in Prague, in April 2001. The meeting, to which Dick Cheney also often refers, is, according to all available evidence, entirely made up. The 9/11 Commission dismissed it, and no compelling countercase has ever been put forth. Meanwhile, neither the *Times* nor Safire has apologized or corrected his lie that the meeting was an "undisputed fact." (It is nothing if not "disputed.") This same propagandist employs his influential perch at the Paper of Record to accuse CBS employees of "crimes" and to demand a criminal prosecution.

Looking back over Clinton-era reporting, the high dudgeon of right-wing pundits vis-à-vis CBS seems even more absurd. *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* columnist Gene Lyons offers this:

> I saw pundit Andrew Sullivan on CNN clucking over CBS' mistakes. In 1994, when Sullivan edited The New Republic, it ran a cover story accusing Bill Clinton of corruptly enriching his wife's law firm by changing Arkansas usury laws as governor. In fact, the deed was done by public referendum under Clinton's Republican predecessor. On Dec. 19, 1995, ABC News' "Nightline" aired a deceptively edited video clip of a Hillary Clinton press conference about Whitewater. It accused her of lying about the very information electronically deleted from her remarks. No consequences followed. On May 4, 1996, The New York Times published an article with a deceptive Associated Press byline stating that an FBI agent's trial testimony described a $50,000 windfall to Whitewater from an illegal loan. As the actual AP article stipulated, the agent gave no such testimony. Many accusatory editorials and columns followed, helping Kenneth Starr to prolong his fruitless investigation of Bill Clinton's finances for years. The Times has never acknowledged its blunder.

CBS's slip-up was such big news because it fit the right-wing script designed to shield the Bush Administration from democratic accountability. Bowing to pressure that blew the story out of all sensible proportion, the network announced that it would withhold until after the election a major investigative scoop. That story involves the Administration's efforts to mislead the nation into war using false claims that Iraq attempted to purchase yellowcake uranium from Niger—which just happens to be the story by which Robert Novak carried its dirty water. Bush was also off the hook for shirking his cushy National Guard service, and John Kerry's hard-hitting speeches about the Iraq quagmire were buried beneath the rubble. Overall, the drama—like the entire election narrative—could hardly have played more effectively for the Republicans if it had been scripted by Karl Rove. Hmm… ■

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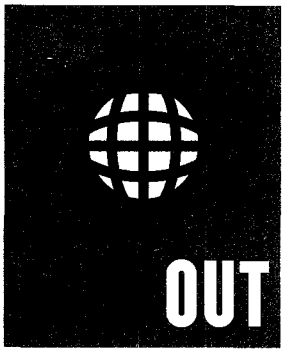
NAOMI KLEIN

You Can't Bomb Beliefs

My first run-in with Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army came on March 31 in Baghdad. The US occupation chief, Paul Bremer, had just sent armed men to shut down the young cleric's newspaper, *Al Hawza*, claiming that its articles comparing Bremer to Saddam Hussein incited violence against Americans. Sadr responded by calling for his supporters to protest outside the gates of the Green Zone, demanding *Al Hawza*'s reopening.



When I heard about the demo, I wanted to go, but there was a problem: I had been visiting state factories all day, and I wasn't dressed appropriately for a crowd of devout Shiites. Then again, I reasoned, this was a demonstration in defense of journalistic freedom—could they really object to a journalist in loose pants? I put on a head scarf and headed over.

Demonstrators had printed up English-language banners that said, LET JOURNALISTS WORK WITH NO TERROR and LET JOURNALISTS DO THEIR WORK. That sounded good, I thought, and started doing my work. I was soon interrupted, however, by a black-clad member of the Mahdi Army: He wanted to talk to my translator about my fashion choices. A friend and I joked that we were going to make up our own protest sign that said, LET JOURNALISTS WEAR THEIR PANTS. But the situation quickly got serious: Another Mahdi soldier grabbed my translator and shoved him against a concrete blast wall, badly injuring his back. Meanwhile, an Iraqi friend called to say she was trapped inside the Green Zone and couldn't leave: She had forgotten to bring a head scarf and was afraid of running into a Mahdi patrol.

It was an instructive lesson about who Sadr actually is: not an anti-imperialist liberator, as some on the far left have cast him, but someone who wants the foreigners out so he can shackle and control large portions of Iraq's population himself. But neither is Sadr the one-dimensional villain painted by so many in the media, a portrayal that has allowed many liberals to stay silent as he is barred from participating in elections and to look the other way while US forces nightly firebomb the civilian population of Sadr City, where the fighting recently knocked out electricity in the midst of a Hepatitis E outbreak.

The situation requires a more principled position. For instance, Muqtada al-Sadr's calls for press freedom may not include the freedom of women journalists to cover him. Yet he still deserves to have his right to publish a political newspaper—not because he believes in freedom but because we supposedly do. Similarly, Sadr's calls for fair elections and an end to occupation demand our unequivocal support—not because we are blind to the threat he would pose if he were actually elected but because believing in self-determination means admitting that the outcome of democracy is not ours to control.

These kinds of nuanced distinctions are commonly made in Iraq: Many people I met in Baghdad strongly condemned the attacks on Sadr as evidence that Washington never intended to bring democracy to their country. They backed the cleric's calls for an end to occupation and for immediate open elections. But when asked if they would vote for him in those elections, most laughed at the prospect.

Yet here in North America, the idea that you can support Sadr's call for elections without endorsing him as Iraq's next prime minister has proved harder to grasp. For arguing this position, I have been accused of making "excuses for the theocrats and misogynists" by Nick Cohen in the *London Observer*, of having "naively fallen for the al-Mahdi militia" by Frank Smyth in *Foreign Policy in Focus* and of being a "socialist-feminist offering swooning support to theocratic fascists" by Christopher Hitchens in *Slate*.

All this manly defense of women's rights is certainly enough to make a girl swoon. Yet before Hitchens rides to the rescue, it's worth remembering how he rationalized his reputation-destroying support for the war: Even if US forces were really after the oil and military bases, he reasoned, the liberation of the Iraqi people would be such a joyous side-effect that progressives everywhere should cheer the cruise missiles. With the prospect of liberation still a cruel joke in Iraq, Hitchens is now claiming that this same anti-woman, anti-gay White House is the Iraqi people's best hope against Sadr's brand of anti-woman, anti-gay religious fundamentalism. Once again we are supposed to hold our noses and cheer the Bradleys—for the greater good, or the lesser evil.

There is no question that Iraqis face a mounting threat from religious fanaticism, but US forces won't protect Iraqi women and minorities from it any more than they have protected Iraqis from being tortured in Abu Ghraib or bombed in Falluja and Sadr City. Liberation will never be a trickle-down effect of this invasion because domination, not liberation, was always its goal. Even under the best scenario, the current choice in Iraq is not between Sadr's dangerous fundamentalism and a secular democratic government made up of trade unionists and feminists. It's between open elections—which risk handing power to fundamentalists but would also allow secular and moderate religious forces to organize—and rigged elections designed to leave the country in the hands of Iyad Allawi and the rest of his CIA/Mukhabarat-trained thugs, fully dependent on Washington for both money and might.

This is why Sadr is being hunted—not because he is a threat to women's rights but because he is the single greatest threat to US military and economic control of Iraq. Even after Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani backed down from his opposition to the handover plans, fearing civil war, Sadr continued to oppose the US-drafted Constitution, continued to call for the withdrawal of foreign troops and continued to oppose US plans to appoint the interim government rather than hold elections. If Sadr's demands are met and the country's fate is truly left in the hands of the majority, US military bases in Iraq will be in serious jeopardy, as will all the privatization-friendly laws pushed through by Bremer.

Progressives should oppose the US attack on Sadr, because it is an attack not on one man but on the possibility of Iraq's democratic future. There is another reason, as well, to

(Continued on Page 30)

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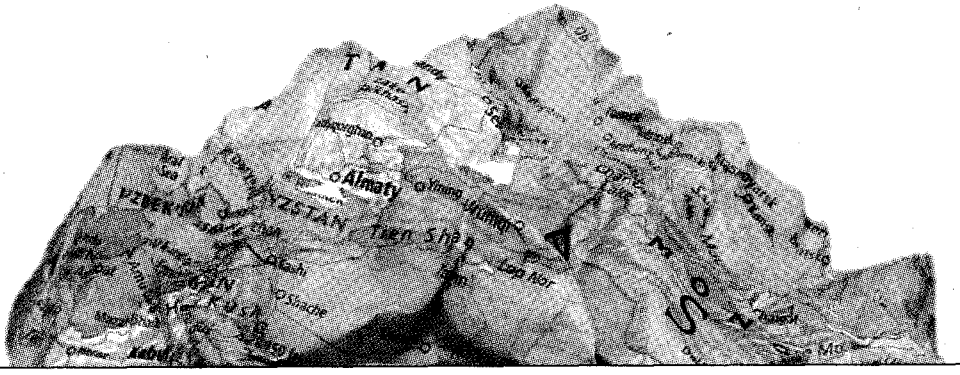
ARTICLES

A WORLD NEGLECTED: THE FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE WE SHOULD BE HAVING



by SHERLE R. SCHWENNINGER

This election, more than any other since 1980, could turn on questions of foreign policy and national security. Yet despite the obvious difference in worldview of the two candidates, and the increasingly acrimonious exchanges between them, the two campaigns have staked out remarkably similar positions on Iraq, the "war on terrorism," and more generally on America's position in the world. Indeed, leaving aside questions of style and tone, the discussion to date has largely come down to the question of who is more capable of carrying out the current agenda: who can better take the war to the terrorists, who can better stay the course in Iraq, who can better terminate Iran's and North Korea's nuclear ambitions, who can better lead America's alliances and maintain our predominant military position in the world.

If the two candidates continue to follow their current scripts, the American public will be the big loser. For the nation badly needs a fuller and more honest debate about the lessons of the Bush era and the challenges and choices it has left us with. Given the enormity of these challenges, this is a debate that cannot be left until after the election or be defined by the current policy positions of the candidates themselves. The place to begin this debate is with the "war on terrorism," which both campaigns have made the centerpiece of their foreign policy and national security strategy.

The 'War on Terrorism'

The "war on terrorism" has always been a troubling concept, in part because it leaves to everyone's political imagination just who the enemy is and in part because it provides a license to ignore the political background to terrorist activity and to overemphasize a military response. It is an even more troubling concept in light of the substantial damage the "war" has done to American interests in the world.

The Kerry campaign, which has recently begun to mount a more coherent critique of Bush's failures, has been correct to criticize the war in Iraq as a diversion of resources from the fight against Al Qaeda, but it has been wrong to accept other aspects of the "war on terrorism" so uncritically. The Administration's strategy has been to take the war to the terrorists, "to get them before they get us." It has thus pursued a forward-based military offensive, albeit one supplemented by increased police and intelligence cooperation with other governments. It has invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, and has established new bases across the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. But this expansion of America's footprint in the Islamic world has been disastrously counterproductive, transforming a limited terrorist threat into a wave of bin Laden–inspired Islamic radicalism that is beginning to ripple across the region.

The fact that Al Qaeda has metastasized from a loose, single organization into a mass movement with many local terrorist groups may have reduced the threat to the US homeland in the

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short term. But it has magnified the problem of radical Islam and has made the United States the central issue in a series of intensifying Islamic civil wars that threaten, to varying degrees, the stability of strategically critical and already unstable countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as well as previously stable US friends like Jordan and the Gulf sheikdoms.

Before September 11 and the launching of the "war on terrorism," Osama bin Laden and his band of Islamic revolutionaries appeared to be a spent force with little or no popular support in most Arab societies. However, Bush's "war on terrorism" in general and his war in Iraq in particular have given new life to bin Ladenism by fusing Islamic radicalism with anti-imperial nationalism and by giving Islamic radicalism the foreign imperial enemy it needs to succeed.

The "war on terrorism" thus has created a much larger and more difficult foreign policy challenge. That challenge is not how to militarily eliminate the growing number of local Al Qaeda–inspired terrorist groups but how to damp down the flames of Islamic revolution that US policy has unwittingly helped stoke before they engulf the region. This calls not just for a smarter war on terrorism, as the Kerry campaign at times has suggested, or a better PR campaign to win hearts and minds, as the Administration seems to think, but a more radical shift in US policy.

The logical alternative to the Administration's forward-based military offensive would be expanded police, intelligence and special-forces cooperation. After all, much of the success we have had with respect to breaking up Al Qaeda has come as the result of arrests and sting operations by allied governments, not military operations. This strategy would be combined with an effort to address the legitimate grievances that have led many people in Islamic societies either to support bin Laden's agenda or to hesitate to join the fight against Al Qaeda. Among these are Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, the stationing of US forces in the Gulf and now the American war in Iraq, which is viewed by many as an attempt to further secure US-Israeli hegemony in the region, including the oil-producing Persian Gulf. Such perceptions cannot be altered by fine words about our support for democracy and freedom but only by real changes in US policy.

Iraq and America's Regional Role

The issue of what American policy toward Iraq should be goes directly to the question of how best to halt the fusion of Islamic radicalism with anti-American nationalism. There is a legitimate argument that a US withdrawal would not only embolden the radicals but leave Iraq a failed state and a haven for terrorists, and that therefore the United States has no choice but to continue to keep substantial military forces in Iraq until stability is assured. This, with minor differences, is the position of both the Bush Administration and the Kerry campaign.

There is an equally legitimate, and in my view stronger, argument, that a continued US military presence will only further radicalize the population and help Islamist extremists by handing them the cause of Iraqi nationalism. This position recognizes that there is no military solution to the insurgency, and that there cannot be a political solution either as long as the US occupation remains the issue. Therefore, we have little choice but to begin to withdraw our troops and renounce any interest in basing rights and oil concessions. Moreover, as we learned from our withdrawal from Lebanon after the bombing of the Marine barracks there in 1983, withdrawing US forces can actually have a beneficial effect, because it removes one of the rallying cries of jihadist movements.

We must also discuss a different role for the United States in the region. Our only choice should not be between two forms of maintaining American hegemony—one with the help of Bush's "coalition of the willing" and the other by asking our traditional allies for money and troops—if for no other reason than that neither is likely to succeed. Bush's crusade to transform the Middle East has been a disaster, and his coalition of the willing is unraveling. The Kerry campaign promises to internationalize the burden of stabilizing Iraq. But it is unrealistic to expect other countries to commit substantial forces and more money in Iraq without an internationalization of other elements of US Middle East policy.

At a minimum, that means giving Europe and the leading powers of the UN Security Council more say in regional affairs, and that in turn means moving our policy closer to the international mainstream position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on Syria and Iran. In other words, true internationalization means not only giving up American dominance but also ending our special treatment of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and normalizing relations with Syria and Iran. We must do so not simply for the sake of world order but because it is not in our interest, and for that matter Israel's, for Washington to support unconditionally the Likud's policies in the West Bank and Gaza and to turn a blind eye to Israel's violations of international law, particularly its illegal expropriation of Palestinian land. And it is not in our interest to pursue a state of belligerence toward Syria and Iran when we need their help in stabilizing Iraq and in curbing Al Qaeda–inspired terrorist groups.

The Military Budget and the US National Security Doctrine

Despite differences on a few details, both candidates have promised to increase military spending (now at $400 billion a year), to further modernize American forces and to keep the United States the predominant military power in the world. We need an alternative that would spend less but better meet our legitimate national security needs.

Such an alternative is possible because both Bush's and Kerry's proposed military budgets are based on unrealistic assumptions about the utility of American military power and the kinds of military missions we can legitimately pursue. Bush's national security doctrine calls for the use of military force for preventive regime change and to halt nuclear proliferation as well as for more traditional military missions like deterrence and defense of the sea lanes and the homeland. It is these new and expansive missions—missions more associated with the pursuit of empire than international order—that are driving the increase in the military budget. In light of our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, we need to have an honest debate as to whether such expansive mis-

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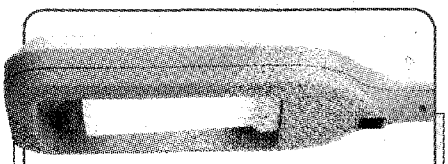

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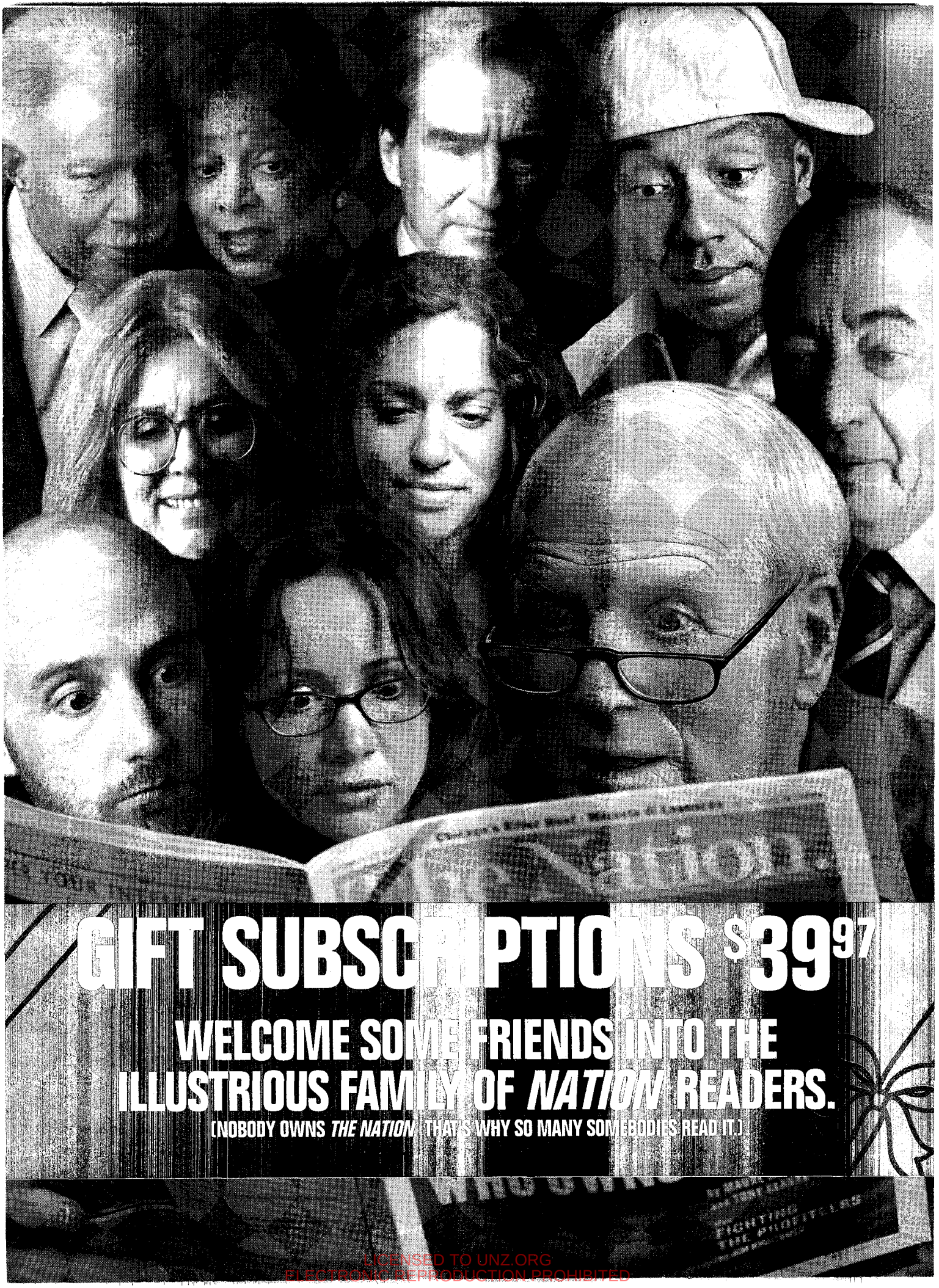
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sions are actually necessary to our national security and consistent with the kind of world order we want to promote.

We also need to ask whether military force is capable of achieving these objectives at an acceptable cost. If anything, the war in Iraq as well as the "war on terrorism" suggests it is not. The Administration's inability to subdue the insurgency and establish minimum order in Iraq shows the limits of US military force in achieving reasonable political goals—at least at an acceptable cost. It has also revealed the limits of America's military reach—an important consideration if preventive regime change becomes a core tenet of our national security policy. Even Washington's limited military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan have stretched American forces thin, thus making any threats against North Korea, Iran and Syria look increasingly hollow. A future administration could end up asking for even more money and more troops, if Washington continues to believe there are military solutions to the problems of Iran and North Korea other than deterrence.

The wiser lesson to draw from Iraq would be that preventive regime change is both too costly and too counterproductive to warrant official approval. Military power is still useful for many traditional defense and deterrence missions, including attacks against known terrorist targets, but it has largely proved ineffectual or counterproductive in promoting democracy or in halting the spread of nuclear weapons. By refusing to acknowledge the limits of military power, yet by constructing a military budget as if preventive regime change is the solution to our security worries, the Bush Administration and the Kerry campaign would divert resources into military options that would be counterproductive in most cases. In so doing, they are also taking resources away from nonmilitary programs that might be able to do far more to create the foundations of stable democracies and to achieve other world-order goals that are more important to our national security.

Counterproliferation and Rogue States

Both candidates—Bush explicitly, Kerry implicitly—give credence to the theory of convergence, the notion concocted by neoconservatives that rogue states with weapons of mass destruction might give those weapons to terrorist groups like Al Qaeda. (To his credit, Kerry gives greater stress to the possibility that terrorists might obtain nuclear weapons from poorly secured Russian or Pakistani weapons facilities and calls for increased spending to secure nuclear material.) And both support a policy that includes the use of force to reverse or eliminate the nuclear weapons programs of potentially hostile states, principally Iran and North Korea.

No one, of course, wants to see a nuclear-armed Iran or North Korea. But the goal of reversing Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs, certainly by coercive means, may be unrealistic, especially in light of our experience in Iraq. Bush's war against Saddam Hussein's regime was meant in part as a warning to both Iran and North Korea, but seems to have had the opposite effect; there is evidence that both have accelerated their nuclear programs as the best way to deter US attacks. And with American forces stretched thin in Iraq, in neither case is the use of force a plausible policy option. Bush's fallback position of further isolating and punishing Iran and North Korea is also problematic, since it might only further accelerate their efforts and would require the full support of our diplomatic partners, none of which is likely to risk a more confrontational approach.

This has left us experimenting with a new regional concert model of managing potential international security problems—as represented by the efforts of Britain, France, Germany and Russia in the case of Iran, and by the six-power framework discussions led by China in the case of North Korea. This model includes inducements of trade and investment as well as nonmilitary pressures, and uses the International Atomic Energy Agency as an impartial judge of Iran's and North Korea's compliance. This model may not be perfect, but it does offer a way to manage the problem and to reduce some of the more worrying security scenarios associated with it. However, it cannot work if it is done in a half-hearted way without full US cooperation.

If we are really serious about wanting these countries to give up their nuclear programs, we must be willing to address their security fears as well as our own. Iran's and North Korea's nuclear weapons programs are not just the result of Iran's regional ambitions or North Korea's economic blackmail goals, but of real security fears, some of them fostered by American policy and, in the case of Iran, by Israel's nuclear capabilities. We must therefore also be open to new regional security arrangements, including the establishment of nuclear-weapons-free zones, that address Iran's and North Korea's security concerns. If we are not willing to go this far, then we need to be willing to fall back on established notions of deterrence and containment.

America's Standing in the World

The one area of major disagreement between the two candidates is over their differing assessments of America's standing in the world and of US alliance relations. There is no doubt that the Bush Administration has badly damaged America's relations with our traditional friends and allies in Europe and Asia. But there is a question as to whether either candidate has a plan that will repair this damage. Restoring American respect is the central positive foreign policy message of the Kerry campaign. Kerry does offer America's allies a more multilateral approach, what his foreign policy team calls "multilateralism if we can, unilateralism if we must." But while Kerry's conditional multilateralism will certainly improve the atmospherics of US-alliance relations, it is only part of the answer.

To begin with, there is little practical difference between Bush's conditional unilateralism and Kerry's conditional multilateralism in cases of major policy disagreement with traditional allies. Indeed, the importance of the distinction between unilateral and multilateral is often overstated, since all countries pursue their interests both unilaterally and multilaterally. The more important question is whether the United States is willing to be bound by international law and treaty and whether it is willing to live by the rules of an interdependent world, which means reconciling our interests with those of other countries upon which we depend.

As important, the causes of our loss of respect and influence go much deeper than our unilateral tendencies. Both campaigns tend to see the world as unipolar, and on a global plane the United States may still be the world's only superpower. Viewed,

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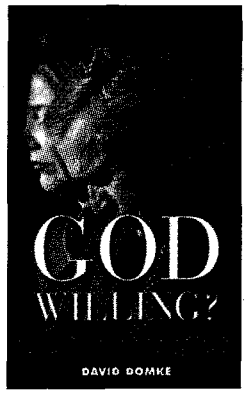

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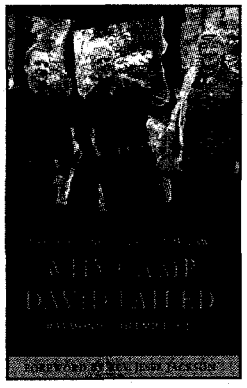

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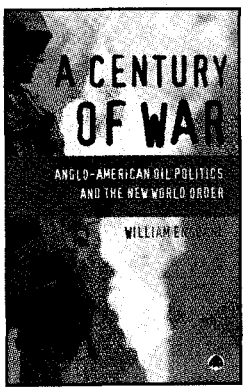

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however, at the level of our key relationships with Europe, Russia, China and Japan, in each case we need these countries as much as or more than they need us—whether it be for money and troops for Iraq and Afghanistan, diplomatic support on Iran and North Korea, or capital to pay for our military budget and our consumption and investment needs. Meanwhile, the economic foundation of our position in the world grows weaker each year, as our international debt continues to climb and with it our dependence on foreign capital. Indeed, this changing balance of power has transformed America's alliance relations in ways not fully appreciated by either campaign. Just a decade ago, the great majority of Europeans wanted to keep the United States involved in Europe; now they want to keep us at a distance in order to insulate themselves from the instability and hatred that Washington's policies are creating in the nearby Arab world. American relations with Asia have similarly been transformed, with much of Asia trying to avoid getting drawn into Washington's "war on terrorism" and trying to prevent the United States from acting precipitately against North Korea.

The countries of Europe and Asia still want to cooperate with us, as they have in tracking down and arresting Al Qaeda terrorists and in providing money and forces in Afghanistan, but they will do so only if it also serves their interests and is consistent with their notions of world order. When it is not, we should expect to encounter resistance if not outright opposition, as we have on Iraq. The days of "what Washington wants, Washington gets" are over. The question is whether either the Bush or the Kerry foreign policy team can reshape American diplomacy accordingly.

The Forgotten World: The Marginalization of American Foreign Policy

After reading the policy statements of the Bush and Kerry campaigns, one would think that the American homeland was under daily terrorist attack, that Iran and North Korea were readying nuclear arsenals for war, and that the future of the world depended upon America succeeding in Iraq. One searches in vain for any analysis of China's rising power or of the economic success of India or of the fate of democracy in our own neighborhood. Occasionally, one hears a reference to genocide in Darfur, to the AIDS pandemic or to the problem of global warming, but these concerns barely figure into our current worldview. The two candidates do not seem to be aware that our obsession with terrorism and rogue states has marginalized us. They continue to see the United States as the center of the universe; in fact, we have been on the periphery of nearly all of the most important geopolitical and geoeconomic developments of the past half-decade: the successful enlargement of the European Union and the launch of the euro; the beginning of what might be an Indian economic miracle; the emergence of China as a responsible regional power; and the re-establishment of the Russian state, notwithstanding its problems in Chechnya, to name just a few.

Even more worrying, the two candidates show no understanding of why in this new world the United States is losing, and others are gaining, influence. In East Asia, China's influence has risen almost as rapidly as Washington's has fallen, because it has better understood the need for diplomacy and negotiation when dealing with North Korea, and because it has spoken to the region's aspi-

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rations with its emphasis on more trade and economic development. In Latin America, government officials are no longer lining up at Washington's door, in part because they now doubt Washington's economic wisdom, given the disastrous record of its brand of neoliberalism, and in part because the European Union has emerged as a more attractive economic and political partner. So little attention have we paid to their concerns, whether on trade or the counterproductiveness of our policy toward Cuba, that populist Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has become a more frequent visitor to most Latin American capitals than George W. Bush.

The political leadership of this country, as exemplified by the campaign positions of Bush and Kerry, has become so obsessed with our own security fears and so convinced of our own virtue that it has very little to offer in the way of positive socioeconomic development initiatives. To most of the people of Latin America, Africa and Asia, the United States has largely become irrelevant to their hopes for a better future—except as a potential market for some of their goods or as a source of outsourced jobs.

These developments are not all bad. Indeed, many of them are welcome because together they show that the foundations of a healthy multipolar world are beginning to emerge and that other countries are beginning to assume greater responsibility for peace and prosperity in their own regions. But this is not a world that either George Bush or John Kerry seems prepared to discuss. And that is perhaps the saddest testament of all to the emptiness of the current foreign policy debate. ■

IT'S NOT JUST 'SECURITY MOMS' BUT SINGLE WOMEN WHO MAY DECIDE KERRY'S FATE.

Missouri's Female Trouble

SHARON LERNER

This article is part of a series that looks at swing states, and swing constituencies, in the 2004 presidential election that have implications for progressive politics. —the Editors

EMILY FLAKE

In July, Deanna Hodges helped organize a meeting of women for John Kerry in the basement of the Presbyterian Church in Crane, Missouri. Composed of a network of country roads where most residents make their living farming chickens or milking cows, Crane is like many towns in southwestern Missouri: small, a long drive from a city and without much in the way of entertainment. But even though Hodges advertised the event in the *Crane Chronicle* and made phone calls inviting her neighbors, only two women showed up. "The word I got was that their husbands didn't want them to come," she explains. "They think the Democrats are just about gays and abortion."

Undeterred, Hodges started going door to door to talk to her neighbors. A 38-year-old mother of two with a round face and a soothing, Southern lilt to her voice, Deanna has yet to have a door slammed on her. But many of her political chats end quickly. The single women in Crane, population 1,390, are most receptive to her message. "They really want to talk," says Hodges. They are also, unfortunately, less likely to vote. As one single mother recently explained to her, just making ends meet and taking care of her daughter keeps her too busy to follow politics, let alone get to the polls. Hodges listened sympathetically, then tried to convince her of the importance of voting. "I told her, 'We women have a lot at stake,'" Hodges recalls. "I told her even the food stamps she relies on hinge on this election."

Pro-choice Baptists who like to call themselves "pro-family," Deanna and her husband, Craig, have found themselves on the lonely side of a political shift that has swept much of the heartland. In the eighteen years they've been married, their area has gradually become a Republican stronghold, helping the party to gain control of both houses of the state legislature in 2002. You could say Deanna is leading the charge to take it back. While the PRESIDENTIAL PRAYER TEAM bumper stickers dominate here, Hodges has slapped her own political message onto her beat-up white minivan: WWJD and PROUD TO BE A DEMOCRAT.

Recently, this stay-at-home mom ratcheted up her political activity and decided to run for a seat in the state legislature. Scraping up enough to buy some airtime on a local station, she ran a radio spot proclaiming that women should be "masters of their own bodies" and that higher wages make for happier families. She and Craig, both gospel musicians, have taken to pointing out in song the un-Christian ways of many religious conservatives. At the Labor Day picnic in Springfield, while picnickers snacked on bratwurst and ogled flame-painted hot rods, the Hodgeses sang "I'm a Democrat" and "When I Die." ("When I die, I may not go to heaven/Falwell says Democrats can't get in/Pack me up and ship me off to Jesus/Jesus the biggest liberal ever been.")

Even her supporters say the chances that Deanna Hodges will triumph over a Republican incumbent in her local race are slim. But she and other women who are turning traditional political stereotypes upside down may be just what the Democratic Party needs. Dodging the "antivalues" bullet all too often launched against Democrats in these parts, Hodges rises above the din of arguments over hot-button religious issues and talks about what she thinks really matters in rural areas like Crane: poverty, jobs, education and healthcare.

Missouri is often thought of as a political predictor of the country. With a conservative middle flanked by the progressive urban

Sharon Lerner is a senior fellow at the Center for New York City Affairs at Milano Graduate School, New School University.

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areas of St. Louis and Kansas City, the state has voted for the winner in every presidential race since 1900 with the exception of 1956. Thus it's not surprising that the 2000 election was both close and contested in Missouri; Gore lost the state by less than 3 percentage points, and confusion, and later lawsuits, emerged from the polls. Even though Bush has recently pulled ahead, pollsters expect narrow margins once again (Nader, who got nearly 2 percent of the vote in 2000, failed to get on the ballot this time).

Missouri is certainly a political microcosm of the country this year in one respect: Women here are key to deciding who will get the state's eleven electoral votes. Recent national polls suggest that the gender gap, which has historically benefited Democrats, is disappearing—some even have Kerry trailing among women, with "security moms" shunning him for the hawkish Bush (though some observers have questioned these results, pointing out that they rest on a GOP-friendly definition of who is a "likely" female voter). In Missouri Kerry was seven points ahead among women in August, according to a Survey USA poll of likely voters. By September 10 his lead had shrunk to zero.

Single women are more likely than both men and married women to oppose the war in Iraq and to disagree with the country's direction.

What this story line leaves out, however, is the significance of the *marriage* gap: Single women are considerably more progressive—they're more likely than both men and married women to oppose the war in Iraq, disagree with the direction the country is taking and care deeply about issues such as education and healthcare. At least in theory, these progressives could still swing the election for Kerry, who enjoys a twenty-two-point lead over Bush among unmarried women who are also likely voters, according to a September 9 survey by the polling firm Democracy Corps.

Single women voters, we've been repeatedly told over the past year, sat out the last election in disproportionate numbers and are now ripe for political engagement. As with NASCAR dads, soccer moms (and now, security moms), stereotypes about this potential voting bloc can be frustratingly reductive. Despite press attention to an elusive "Sex and the City voter," presumably a trendy young thing who is too busy shopping to vote, the 22 million single women who didn't participate in 2000 include divorced, widowed and never-married women of all ages and classes, many of them parents. In Missouri, the category includes everyone from the moderate single moms of Crane to Diane Pell, the proprietor of Middle Class Values, a knickknack shop in Kansas City, Missouri. Pell, who has repeatedly sold out of Smoosh Bush dolls and "National Embarrassmints," tins of candy with Bush and Cheney on the cover, plainly says she "despises Bush big time."

On the ground in Missouri, the practical reality of reaching the alienated single women who might not otherwise vote—while also winning over "security moms" and other undecided women who span the ideological spectrum—is proving complicated for Democrats. Consider the amorphous issue that is the single biggest concern of unmarried women in Missouri: that children learn values and respect. Single women here place this goal above worries about healthcare, the rise in prices relative to income, affordable retirement and prescription drug costs, which, in that order, also matter to them, according to "Women's Voices. Women Vote," a group organized around single women's political potential in the coming election. But how can Democrats reach out to women on an issue that escapes conventional campaign language, not to mention the purview of government (an issue, it should be noted, that is thought of as a winner for conservatives)? And how can anyone convince Missouri's single women—59 percent of whom voted in 2000, as opposed to 67 percent of the state's overall voting-age population—that it's worth their while to go to the polls, when the stuff of their lives clearly eludes politics as we know it? Concerned with matters far from Swift Boats, many of these potential voters have been simply off the political map.

Since three-quarters of single women who didn't vote in 2000 weren't registered, at least the first step was clear. In Missouri, several organizations rose to the task of registering female voters. "Women's Voices. Women Vote" aimed a mail-based voter registration campaign at 118,000 single women here. Meanwhile, the combined efforts of such groups as America Coming Together (ACT), Voting Is Power and Project Vote added some 120,000 new voters to the rolls before the close of the registration period (not an insignificant number, considering that Gore lost Missouri by 78,676 votes in 2000), an estimated 65,000 of whom were women, according to Grant Williams, state director for Missouri ACT.

Getting through to the angry, apathetic or simply overwhelmed woman to convince her to register is itself difficult. Take it from Jo Ann King, a single woman who works for Missouri Progressive Vote Coalition, which conducts voter registration among African-Americans. King, who was recently registering women in the waiting room of a local free clinic on weekly "maternity day," said many of the women she approaches are not registered because they are so "oppressed, depressed, and disillusioned, they don't believe their votes matter."

Overcoming such alienation takes persistence. "I was talking to this one woman, she said she didn't vote, she didn't want to vote," King recalled. "But I just kept on talking. I said, 'Did she have kids? And did she know that this election would affect money for schools?'" After listening to King at some length, the woman decided to register. "She told me it was like she was coming out of a coma and mine was the first voice she heard. And we ended up hugging and crying right there in the parking lot."

Still, registration might be the easy part. More complicated is insuring that voters actually get to the polls. Lisa Christian, a political consultant in Kansas City, Missouri, insists that the best way to get women to vote is to have female friends or trusted acquaintances reach out to them one on one. Thus she recently invited her yoga instructor to a Kerry rally, and the instructor in turn has begun talking to her classes about the importance of supporting him in the election. She is hoping for a similar payoff from her massage therapist. "I suggested that she say a little something before she begins the massage, like 'Wouldn't it be a shame if women didn't get health benefits because you didn't vote?'" (Though such a tactic could be bad for business, Christian points out that it could also heighten the need for a relaxing massage.) And Jill Dunlap, who works at the women's center at the University of Missouri at

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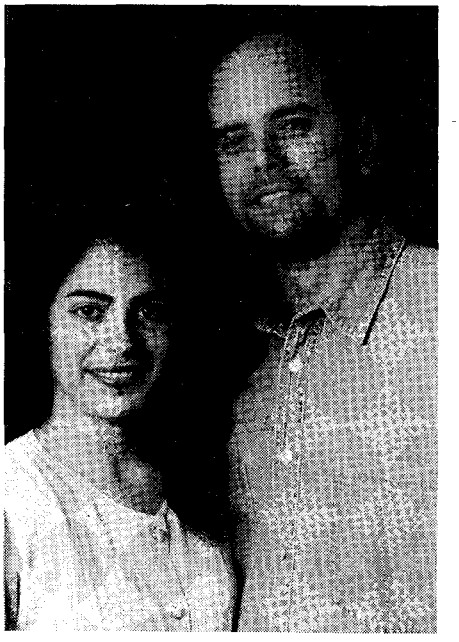

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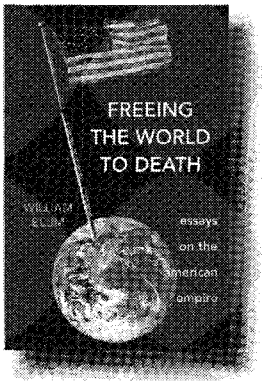

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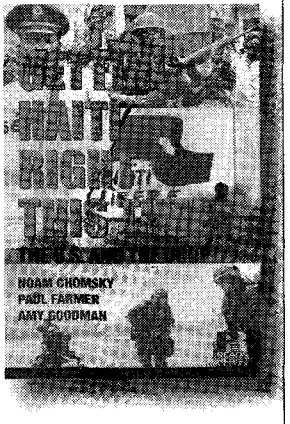

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—NOAM CHOMSKY

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Kansas City, has begun her own one-woman campaign, placing notes in the stalls of the women's bathroom urging students to vote.

The Missouri Democratic Party is trying to take this woman-to-woman approach statewide. At an August "Women for Kerry" luncheon held at the Salad Bowl restaurant in St. Louis, Stacey Newman proposed that each of the sixty or so women in attendance adopt five single female registered voters who had been identified as undecided. Newman, who is the only full-time Democratic Party staff person devoted to coordinating the women's vote in the state, culled these single women's names and telephone numbers from voter registration records and asked volunteers to call their five adoptees and explain their personal reasons for voting for Kerry.

"You can do it in your bathrobe!" enthused Newman, who suggested that the callers acquaint themselves with a handout on why John Kerry is "Strong on Women" and then "speak from the heart" to the politically alienated women they need to reach. A former flight attendant who was apolitical herself not so many years ago, Newman thinks such personalized outreach campaigns, which are happening in twenty counties throughout Missouri, are key to a Kerry victory here.

But the "adopt 5" strategy is slow going. Making her way alphabetically through the undecided single women in the St. Louis area, Newman had reached the K's at press time. Although the undecided female voters she's targeting tend to agree with Democrats on issues like promoting jobs, fiscal responsibility and making healthcare more affordable and available, Republicans tend to win their support on defense and national security, according to a July study by the prochoice group Emily's List. Especially in Missouri, their votes can be crucial. Estimates of the nationwide number of undecided voters are as low as 2 percent, but as many as 5 percent of Missouri voters have yet to make up their minds, and 55 percent of those still on the fence are women.

Meanwhile, the Bush camp is eagerly beckoning to women from the other side of the fence (Laura Bush hosted one of the first "W Stands for Women" events, in St. Louis on August 17). "Republicans have realized there are a lot of segments of this vote who can be theirs: married women, religious women, businesswomen," says Harriett Woods, a former lieutenant governor and guru of Democratic politics in Missouri.

Indeed, the partisan split is reflected in the record number of women running for statewide office here; among the six female candidates are Claire McCaskill, a Democrat who has a good shot at becoming governor, and two Republicans, one of whom, Catherine Hanaway, is a vocal, antichoice conservative. Says Woods, "The danger for Democrats has been to assume that if they turn out the women's vote, that's all they have to do."

To peel undecided female voters away from the Republicans, Woods suggests homing in on the issue of defense and highlighting the human toll of the war. "I'm convinced women really care about the1,000 people who will never come back from Iraq alive," she says. The war, which more women than men nationwide believe has made us less secure by a margin of 8 percentage points, clearly nags at some women swing voters in this state, where military participation is high.

"I just don't know who to support," says one woman as she leans out the door of her split-level ranch in the suburban St.

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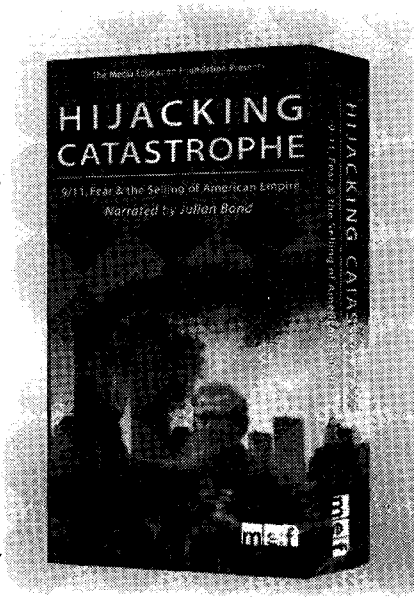

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Louis neighborhood of Concord-Village. "I voted for Bush last time, but I feel like he just went to war as soon as he could," she says, looking distraught. So why not vote for Kerry? "I'm religious," she says with a significant frown.

Sarah London, a political organizer for AFSCME in St. Louis, speaks to such conflicted women every day as she walks neighborhoods campaigning for Democratic state legislative candidates. While the women who open their doors to London often warm to the legislators she promotes when told they support stem-cell research and increased funding for education and oppose the right to carry concealed weapons, many let the issue of abortion decide whom they'll vote for. "I've never heard more women say, 'I vote a straight pro-life ticket,'" says London.

Abortion is the live, painful wire running through Missouri politics. Even though a majority of Missourians are pro-choice—according to a poll conducted by Planned Parenthood in March, 57 percent of the state's registered voters want to keep abortion legal—the religious right controls the debate. Many Missourians—whether because they truly think abortion is murder, because their church says it's evil or because openly supporting a woman's right to end a pregnancy will lose them friends—are terrified of the issue. So are their elected officials: Almost half of Democrats serving in the state legislature now vote anti-choice. And legislators here often tack abortion-related amendments onto unrelated bills as a way to kill them.

In fact, there is little any legislator can do to further limit abortions here, since virtually every possible restriction is already in place: Parental consent is required for minors, as is a twenty-four-hour waiting period before abortions. And a Missouri legislative statute defines life as beginning at conception. Meanwhile, the state attorney general is appealing a ruling that struck down a statewide ban on some abortions, despite the fact that such bans have repeatedly been ruled unconstitutional. Taken together, the state's antiabortion efforts garnered Missouri one of eighteen "F's" from NARAL, which issues state reproductive rights report cards.

In the hopes of being both politic and polite (an esteemed value in this semi-Southern state), pro-choice Missourians are extremely careful with their words when forced to discuss the topic. "I don't say 'I'm pro-choice,' I just say that I'm for leaving these matters to a woman and her pastor," explains Sara Lampe, a Democratic candidate for the state legislature in Springfield, Missouri's third-largest city, which is home to two Bible colleges and the international headquarters of the Assemblies of God church. "And then," adds Lampe, "I move on." Lampe has plenty else she'd like to discuss. A former teacher and principal who lives with and cares for her 91-year-old bedridden mother, she would like to focus her campaign on elder care and public funding for education. As a divorced mother of three, she'd also like to ease the multiple burdens shouldered by other single moms (who, she says, won't vote in substantial numbers until the polls are located in supermarkets). But running against a Republican incumbent who has worked as a Christian counselor using "conversion therapy" on homosexuals has meant spending considerable time and energy staving off questions about abortion and its more ambiguous though equally potent cousin: "values."

For Chere Chaney, the GOP push on values—a mix of same-sex marriage, abortion and vague ideas about personal piety—is a

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constant frustration. "They keep saying 'God, guns and gays' and we say 'jobs and the war,'" says Chaney, western Missouri political coordinator for the Communications Workers of America. While her members are severely hurt by Bush policies, including recent restrictions on overtime pay, Chaney says some are still pulled away from the Democrats by local churches peddling the message that Kerry is not the "moral" candidate. "As long as they're beating them to death every Sunday telling them they're going to hell, we're in trouble," says Chaney. "It wouldn't be so bad if [churches] were just registering voters, but they're threatening folks with losing their soul if they don't vote for the President."

Many saw Missouri's vote on a state constitutional amendment that eliminated the possibility of gay marriage as a flexing of local churches' political muscle. But, while the amendment passed by a whopping 71 percent, the results may not be particularly relevant to the presidential race here, mostly because Democrats succeeded in putting the measure up for a vote during the primary instead of the general election, when increased turnout among religious conservatives would have helped Bush. (Unfortunately, in eleven other states, including embattled Oregon and Ohio, state constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage will be on the ballot in November.)

Missouri Democrats are even less eager to talk about gay marriage than abortion. Melba Curls, a Democratic State Representative and member of Freedom, Inc., an African-American political group based in Kansas City, says she felt the debate sidetracked her constituents. "I told folks, It doesn't matter who's in bed together. It matters that you got a bed," says Curls. Still, Freedom, Inc. remained silent on the issue, as did the local La Raza Political Club. For his part, Kerry said he would have voted for the gay-marriage ban. (To the glee of the flip-flop brigade and the confusion of everyone else, Kerry went on to say in a September interview with a gay newspaper that he wouldn't have voted for the amendment had it been a "simple prohibition" on gay marriage, though, in fact, that's what it was.) Meanwhile, in Crane, Deanna Hodges, who shrugged off e-mail responses to a pro-choice radio ad calling her a demon, a communist and the Antichrist, feels she can't address same-sex marriage. "We just can't bring that up here," she says. "No one would talk to us."

It's hard to see the frightened look in Hodges's eyes without thinking that the culture war is a lost cause in Missouri. "We're not going to win at the ballot box at this point," concedes Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, though he argues that today's ballot initiatives are just skirmishes in a longer war. While their opponents have prevailed thus far by galvanizing the grassroots to protect the traditional family, gay advocates, Foreman insists, will eventually mount their own populist campaigns in places like Missouri, convincing people of the unfairness of denying legal rights to unmarried couples.

With the bitter battle over the same-sex-marriage referendum behind them, most people here seem happy to talk about the burning issues that don't ignite religious outrage. For Sara Lampe, the single mom who cares for her mother while she runs for office in Springfield, one of those issues is lowering healthcare costs. For Deanna Hodges, in Crane, where the public schools have recently suffered major cuts, restoring education funding tops the list. For Chere Chaney in Kansas City, who went to work in a factory after her divorce to raise her two young sons, the primary concern is that workers make a living wage. Melba Curls, who represents many African-American families who have children fighting in Iraq, is deeply concerned about the war.

Focusing on these goals—or values, if you prefer—might help Democrats win the desperately needed women's vote in Missouri and other swing states. Given the increased time and resources people would have to spend with their children if they were achieved, such policies could even help give single women what they tell pollsters they so desperately want: a better shot at having well-behaved and respectful children. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

the "peaceful" forces with whom Klein seems to empathize.

In "Meet the New Jihad," in *Time*, Michael Ware reports that the Iraqi militants' goal now is "broader than simply forcing the U.S. to leave. They want to transform Iraq into what Afghanistan was in the 1980s: a training ground for young jihadists who will form the next wave of recruits for al-Qaeda and like-minded groups." One of the "jihadists" is asked what he will do if US forces finally pull out of Iraq. His answer: "We will follow them to the U.S."

In her November 25, 2003, *Toronto Globe & Mail* article about FTAA negotiations in Florida, Klein used the phrase "heavy-handed police and propaganda tactics brought Baghdad to Miami." Now, dismayed at the lack of uproar against the war and its importance to the coming election, Klein talks of bringing Najaf to New York.

Ms. Klein, Sadr's forces butchered scores of Iraqi policemen and their families in a most horrific manner, then left their bodies to rot in the basement of a courthouse. Children were boiled, spouses were roasted with blowtorches and police officers were hacked to death in attempts to derive information and demonstrate the depth of Sadr's will to all who oppose him and his movement. His followers used the sacred cemetery and historic mosque as their bases of military operations, blatantly disregarding the rule of law, the laws of war and the will of their own people. They fired mortars and rocket-propelled grenades repeatedly without regard for homes, businesses or civilians in their line of fire. And during three weeks of fighting, America lost 130 injured, and four soldiers and seven Marines killed in action. As much as you want to believe that we are the bad guys, I promise you that the blood of these eleven brave Americans was not spilled as part of some evil US occupation; it was lost so you can continue to live in peace, free to grumble and dissent.

Please be careful with your mix of fact and fiction as you try to gain the sympathies of your readership. If you understood the true nature and motivations of those we Americans are fighting, you would not clamor to bring Najaf to New York; New Yorkers have suffered enough evils from the hands of radical Muslims. Go to your protests and write your antiwar rhetoric; we will still stand up for you, and many of us will die in the process. We will continue to fight, with peace our ultimate goal. We are privileged to have the honor of doing so, for our desire is to keep Najaf in Najaf. MAJ. GLEN BUTLER
United States Marine Corps

Naomi Klein replies to this letter in her "Lookout" column, on page 12. *—The Editors*

CORRECTION

■ In Scott Sherman's "Chastening of the *Times*" last week, the Jonathan Landman quote from *Vanity Fair*, on page 32, should have read, "What was happening was a kind of undifferentiated rage at big [not 'his'] parts of the paper."

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COMMENT

(Continued From Page 8)

demand proof of residency before providing basic services.

Two days after my ride with Chism, the press reported that the past weekend had been the deadliest in three years along the border, with the discovery of at least a dozen corpses. The bodies of five people found together on their way north could have been those Agent Chism had been tracking. MARC COOPER

Marc Cooper, a Nation *contributing editor, is a senior fellow at the USC Annenberg Institute for Justice and Journalism.*

Kerry's Trade Winds

Senator John Kerry has promised a revision of Clinton-era trade policies to insure that future agreements contain stronger, enforceable labor and environmental standards. Even such a pro-corporate free-trading Clintonista as former trade czar Mickey Kantor now agrees that NAFTA needs "freshening." And Charlene Barshefsky, another former Clinton trade representative, admits that the views of critics like Senator Ernest Hollings, once denounced by the Administration as protectionist, have become more attractive.

Kerry thus has joined the Democratic Congressional leadership and constituency groups making up the party base in opposing the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). The Kerry platform promises a 120-day trade policy review with a general commitment to including enforceable labor and environmental standards in trade agreements that now protect only private investors. The Democratic platform also acknowledges the full range of critics' concerns—from privatizing and deregulating public services, to outsourcing government work, to impacts on the environment and food safety. Kerry has also declared that both the executive branch and Congress should work to ban the billions in current public subsidies going to government contractors employing sweatshop labor.

If implemented, these initiatives would represent a departure from the Democratic Party's recent glorification of free trade, though it would be a minimal return to reforming and regulating corporate practices in developing countries, a New Deal approach to the global economy. Not by accident, if one considers the history of third parties, the Democrats have edged toward Ralph Nader's policies—even as they are doing all they can to destroy his candidacy.

How has this happened? First and foremost, NAFTA has proven to be sharply different from what it promised to be. The rich-poor divide has widened in Mexico, with the minimum wage there down by 20 percent since NAFTA was implemented. The 800,000 maquiladora jobs created in Mexico after plants left the United States are now rapidly disappearing to China, with a third already gone. Manufacturing jobs in such venerable towns as Goshen, Indiana, the widget capital of the United States, are vanishing along with a community way of life. Millions of software, engineering, accounting, legal, architectural and other service jobs are now being outsourced to Asia. In addition, a growing clutch of US judges, including chief justices in many states, are startled to discover that NAFTA tribunals were empowered to second-guess their rulings and force payment of US tax dollars to foreign investors, who argue that their property rights under NAFTA supersede domestic government laws and regulations.

Smart politicians and policy-makers adjust to reality. As the Democratic primary candidates traveled the country in places like Iowa, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Ohio, they came face to face daily with the victims of a failed US trade policy—people who have lost their jobs or farms, suffered a crash in their wages and standard of living or seen their community poisoned and who are demanding a better future.

The *New York Times*, still pushing editorially for CAFTA, had to acknowledge in its news coverage that "Globalism Minus Jobs Equals Campaign Issue" and "Farmers and Labor Press Global Trade as a Campaign Issue." In February, echoing his rivals John Edwards and Howard Dean, Kerry embraced enforceable labor and environmental standards. He began to argue for closing tax loopholes that encourage corporate outsourcing as well.

Global justice activists have called on Democrats to adopt a "prudent pause" on implementing trade agreements that do not meet core democratic policy goals like access to safe food, affordable medicines, healthcare and education as well as protection of the environment and promotion of labor rights. They demand that Kerry's vague proposal for a trade policy review be developed into a review of the World Trade Organization, NAFTA, CAFTA and related trade mechanisms by labor, environmental groups, family farmers, consumers, clergy, women's groups—and the business sector.

If Kerry wins, his mandate should usher in a climate beneficial to social movements. But activists for global justice will have to battle for real progress instead of token policy tweaks. Meanwhile, the corporate free traders will wring their hands over any steps to regulate the global economy, calling it "protectionism," which they fear will revive the anticorporate image of the Democratic Party among its donors.

Regardless of which candidate wins, Iraq will cast a shadow over efforts to refocus on trade and domestic policy. The antiwar movement may link itself more strongly to the trade debate, since it has now become clearer that Paul Bremer's mission as US proconsul in Iraq was to employ "market shock" to force open the economy to foreign interests like those of his friends at Kissinger Associates. Bush's 2002 "National Security Strategy of the United States" had already wed military unilateralism to economic unilateralism, promoting free trade, lower taxes and "pro-growth legal and regulatory policies" in its national security policy.

If Bush wins, the anti-empire struggle surely will intensify globally. Bush's vision for the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, for example, faces powerful pressure for reform of the free-traders' "Washington Consensus" from elected governments in Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela, as well as raging popular resistance to the whole project of neoliberalism. Voters in India recently shocked the global elite by throwing out a government that pushed free-trade fundamentalism. The hostility to corporate outsourcing will continue to deepen among working- and middle-class voters here at home, causing a crisis for Democratic Party centrists, whose remedies, such as retraining, sound

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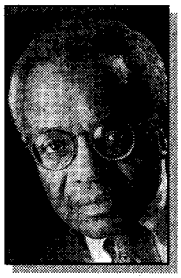

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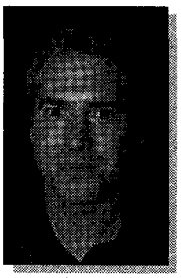

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Dec. 9	Thu	Road Town, Tortola	7:00AM	4:00PM
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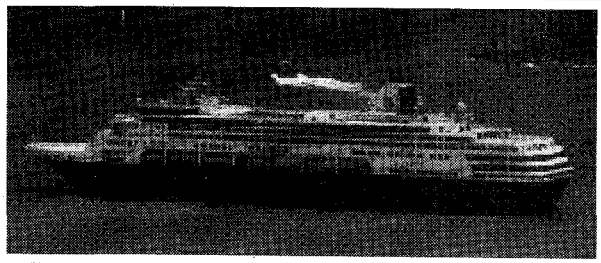

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like so much hot air, as jobs vanish to cheap labor markets. The challenge for Democrats will be to find a resonant voice on populist and class issues or drift further toward becoming the liberal wing of an ascendant Republican majority.

TOM HAYDEN AND LORI M. WALLACH

Tom Hayden teaches at Occidental College and is the author of Street Wars *and* The Zapatista Reader. *Lori M. Wallach is director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch (www.tradewatch.org).*

LA's Liberty Vote

"This time will be different—this time we are in it for the long haul." That's what voter registration and turn-out-the-vote projects say every four years, when they go to work trying to do something about the fact that 100 million Americans—most of them poor and working class—don't vote. This year more work and more money are going into voter registration and turnout than ever before. More than a thousand projects are under way nationwide. Among the most promising: Liberty Vote in Los Angeles, which really is different and really might change things for the long haul.

The problem in low-income, low-turnout communities is that poor people understandably view politics with cynicism and distrust. Research shows that direct mail and phone calls don't work. Voter registration tables outside the mall or volunteers standing on corners with clipboards don't do very well either. The Liberty Vote strategy is different: not just voter registration and get out the vote on Election Day but "voter engagement," which seeks a culture change. The best way to get nonvoters to vote, in this view, is for a member of their own community to knock on their door. Liberty Vote is working with community organizations in poor neighborhoods that until now have not been engaged in electoral work.

In Los Angeles, neighborhood organizations involved in Liberty Vote are now making voter work another tool in community organizing, another way to recruit and train volunteers. The Union de Vecinos is typical—a group with several neighborhood committees working on local environmental justice issues in East LA. Kafi Watlington-MacLeod, a Liberty Vote consultant, explains, "They will be going door to door, speaking Spanish, hoping to sign up 2,000 new voters in Boyle Heights. Their new plan is that, in nonelection years, their neighborhood committees will work on local toxic issues; in election years, those committees will turn into precinct teams." Another Liberty Vote group, the LA Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness, is working on registering very low income and homeless people. It conducted focus groups of homeless people last spring to help come up with a strategy. Nancy Berlin, coordinator of the Welfare Reform Advocacy Project, explained, "The focus group in South LA, which was mostly people 18 to 35, was angry—they said nothing ever changes, the problems are too big, 'our votes don't count.' But they also had procedural problems—they had no idea about how to register or where to vote. We found that if we talked about issues, like the upcoming ballot initiative amending the three strikes law, people got interested and wanted to register and vote."

Peer training is a key component of Liberty Vote. Four big community organizations with some political experience are taking the lead in training six smaller neighborhood groups. Each Liberty Vote group will focus on a different low-income, low-turnout area. Each group has set a numerical target for new voter turnout, and the project will report on which organizations and which approaches succeeded—and which didn't.

Money, of course, is crucial to training and staffing Liberty Vote. It's being funded in a new way: not by candidates, parties or unions, but by the tax-exempt, nonprofit Liberty Hill Foundation, which has funded grassroots neighborhood organizing groups in LA County for over twenty-five years. Liberty Hill is planning to spend $385,000 on Liberty Vote this year, and a total of $1.3 million over three years. It hopes to get substantial support from other foundations. Until now, nonprofits like Liberty Hill have avoided funding voter work from fear of running afoul of IRS rules. Because contributions are tax-deductible, the group's political activity is strictly limited. Republicans are well aware of the potential of these new strategies and have begun attacking nonprofits' engagement with politics as a violation of their 501(c)(3) status. In June 2001 a right-wing group backed by oil and tobacco firms, Frontiers of Freedom, asked the IRS to revoke the tax-exempt status of the Rainforest Action Network on the grounds that it was diverting funds intended for "public education" toward political advocacy. The *Wall Street Journal* predicted the effort would be expanded. One strategist told the *Journal*, "Reporting political enemies to the IRS is an attractive tactic because it forces the enemy to spend resources and sleepless nights," adding that "adverse publicity is an added bonus, particularly if it scares away donors."

But fear of violating IRS rules is based more on ignorance than on the law itself. George Pillsbury, policy director for MassVote, in Boston, a model for Liberty Vote, explained in a pamphlet that while nonprofits cannot endorse or campaign for or contribute money to a candidate or a party, they can do voter registration, voter education and get-out-the-vote work. "Voter education" can include information about candidates, ballot questions and issues. Get-out-the-vote work can include maintaining voter lists, knocking on doors and making Election Day reminder calls. And tax-exempt groups can also campaign for electoral reform—they can mobilize around demands for Election Day registration and fair elections, including improved voting machinery.

Liberty Vote is looking beyond November 2 toward a long-term shift away from the left's historic antagonism to mainstream electoral politics. The movements of the 1960s and after rejected the Democratic Party, which had brought the Vietnam War. They built their movements without linking them to an electoral strategy. "We've come to realize that was a mistake," says Torie Osborn, executive director of the Liberty Hill Foundation and a longtime progressive organizer and activist. "We have seen the victory of the new right in taking over the Republican Party. They did not separate their own movement building from electoral mobilization. We think we can learn something from their example." JON WIENER

Jon Wiener, a Nation *contributing editor, is on the board of the Liberty Hill Foundation. His latest book,* Historians in Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud and Politics in the Ivory Tower, *will be published in January.*

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COMMENT

Junk Mail

by Bruce McCall

The following solicitation from the Republican Committee to Re-elect the President (GOP-CREEP) reached us by mistake.

Dear Friend of the President:

We head toward the November Presidential election in a time of global terrorism, a sputtering economy, everybody getting fat and nobody getting educated. But let's get serious. Come November, only money can safeguard an unbroken continuation of that vital balance of power between the Executive branch and the Executive branch's friends.

Invest in your future. Give till your stockholders and employees hurt. Contribute now to the 2004 Republican Presidential re-election campaign!

***"It's fair to say that anybody who opposes the re-election of our President is a gutless weasel traitor!"*—Fox News**

PRIZES * PRIZES * PRIZES * PRIZES * PRIZES * PRIZES * PRIZES

You've learned from past donations that giving also means getting. Quid Pro Quo isn't the motto of the Committee to Re-elect the President for nothing! And this year, in return for your financial support, the prizes are more exciting and more valuable than ever:

- $1 billion: Invasion of the country of your choice by US forces*
- $500 million: Supreme Court reversal of the Scopes Trial verdict
- $250 million: Notes-free White House meeting on Administration policy toward your industry. P.S. Bring your friends!
- $125 million: Discuss a legal case with the Supreme Court Justice of your choice
- $75 million: Presidential support of the Death Sentence for Gay Marrieds bill—includes a speech by Attorney General John Ashcroft
- $50 million: Be CIA head for the day
- $25 million: Declare a Homeland Security Department Orange Alert
- $10 million: Pajama party (ladies only) with First Lady, Lincoln bedroom
- $5 million: Write President's Saturday radio address
- $1 million: Choice of "Bush 2004" coffee mug, tote bag or umbrella

**depending on availability*

***"Where's Joe McCarthy when our nation needs him?"*—Ann Coulter**

Join the 2004 Re-election Budget Brigade of pre-millionaire Republicans and select from among these unique thank-you gifts:

- $1,000: Giant **Mission Accomplished** display banner
- $500: 500 **Wanted Dead or Alive** Osama Bin Laden posters
- $250: Luncheon with Secretary of State Colin Powell
- $100: Lifting of any ten environmental regulations affecting your industry
- $50: Appointment as US Ambassador to France
- $1: Advance copy of latest official scientific report on global warming

* * *

Think that's it? You don't know the Republican Committee to Re-elect the President! Deliver your contribution in CASH (small bills, please!) and you'll receive a No-Strings Postdated Blanket Presidential Pardon—so you can finally enjoy peace of mind when you violate the law.

WE ACCEPT: BAHAMIAN CURRENCY...PIGGYBANKS...TRIPLE-ENDORSED CHECKS!

Pssst! Be A Phantom Donor!

Too shy or too culpable for out-in-the-open political giving? A senior Republican Party deniability expert will meet you in your nonreciprocity-treaty nation of exile or anyplace—anytime, anywhere—to receive your donation and guarantee anonymity!

Extra Bonus! Phantom Donors receive the coveted Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia "Secret Santa" Medal, awarded for exemplary tact in making unrecorded political donations!

Isn't the re-election of our President worth money that would otherwise just be gathering dust in some offshore bank account, corporate slush fund or buried strongbox? Let's review:

Your gift of more than $1.5 million in cash brings National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice to your door for an inside personal briefing on what she didn't know about Iraq's WMDs and when she didn't know it (if she is able to recall)! For another $1 million, "Condi" will smile!

FINAL WARNING!

Foil the Democrat terror coddlers and their "fair and square" election tricks. Your contribution to the Republican Committee to Re-elect the President will buy pre-tested voting machines...private detectives...personal political smears that look just like TV spots...an Iraqi government that listens—and much, much more!

Bruce McCall is a New York City artist and writer.

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LOOKOUT

(Continued From Page 12)

defend Sadr's democratic rights: It's the best way to fight the rise of religious fundamentalism in Iraq.

Far from reducing the draw of extremism, the US attack on Sadr has greatly strengthened it. Sadr has deftly positioned himself not as the narrow voice of strict Shiites but as an Iraqi nationalist defending the entire country against foreign invaders. Thus, when he was attacked with the full force of the US military and dared to resist, he earned the respect of millions of Iraqis living under the humiliation and brutality of occupation.

The heavy-handed attempts to silence Sadr have also served to confirm the worst fears of many Shiites—that they are being betrayed by the Americans once again, the same Americans who supported Saddam during the Iran-Iraq war, which took the lives of more than 100,000 Iraqis; the same Americans who told them to rise up in 1991, only to leave them to be slaughtered. Now, under siege once again, many are seeking refuge in the certainties of fundamentalism, not to mention in the emergency social services provided by the mosques. Some are even concluding that they need a tyrant of their own, a fierce fundamentalist to do battle with the other strongmen trying to control Iraq.

This shift in attitude is evident in all the polling. A Coalition Provisional Authority poll in May, after the first US siege on Najaf, found that opinion of Sadr had improved among 81 percent of Iraqi respondents. An Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies poll ranked Sadr—a marginal figure only six months before—as Iraq's second most influential political player after Sistani.

Most alarming, the attacks appear to be boosting support not only for Sadr personally but for theocracy generally. In February, the month before Paul Bremer closed down Sadr's newspaper, an Oxford Research International survey found that a majority of Iraqis wanted a secular government: Only 21 percent of respondents said their favored political system was "an Islamic state" and only 14 percent ranked "religious politicians" as their preferred political actors. Fast-forward to August, with Najaf under siege by US forces: The International Republican Institute reported that a staggering 70 percent of Iraqis want Islam and Shariah as the basis of the state. The poll didn't differentiate between Sadr's unyielding interpretation of Shariah and more moderate versions represented by other religious parties. Yet it's clear that some of the people who told me back in March that they supported Sadr but would never vote for him are beginning to change their minds.

In response to my last column, "Bring Najaf to New York," *The Nation* received a letter from Maj. Glen Butler, a US Marine helicopter pilot stationed in Najaf (see "Letters," page 2). Major Butler defends the siege on the holy city by saying that he and his fellow Marines were trying to prevent the "evil" of "radical Muslims" from spreading—"Our desire is to keep Najaf in Najaf."

Well, it's not working. Helicopter gunships are good at killing people. Beliefs, when under fire, tend to spread.

* * *

Response to Butler's letter: There are several other points Butler raises that demand a response. He dismisses my claim that children have been killed by US soldiers in Najaf as "the stereotypical 'baby killer' myth." I wish it were a myth. In the week I wrote my column, the *New York Times* ran a story quoting Hussein Hadi, the deputy director of Najaf's main hospital. Dr. Hadi said that the death toll from the siege Major Butler participated in "includes more women and children than before. 'This time, it's the average people that are dying.... Now the Americans are using heavier weapons. We see many children with more severe injuries.'"

Butler claims that US troops had to go into the cemetery because Sadr "left us little choice." Yet the battle against Sadr—like the invasion itself—was a choice from the start. For the first year of the occupation, armed resistance against US troops was concentrated in the so-called Sunni Triangle; there was no organized Shiite resistance to speak of. It was only after US occupation powers closed down Sadr's newspaper, arrested his deputies, fired on peaceful demonstrators and surrounded his mosque that the Shiites were goaded into battle. A similar provocation was staged in August, precipitating the siege on the shrine and the cemetery fighting. Coalition forces broke a two-month truce by arresting several key Sadr supporters and then sending a convoy of six military vehicles to surround the home where Sadr had been staying, sparking an armed battle. Army officials said it was a mistake.

As for Butler's "culturally sensitive military," I don't doubt that many individual soldiers are doing their best to learn about the country they are occupying. But the overall picture is distinctly more grim. This is the same culturally sensitive military whose first act as occupier was to hang a US flag over the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square, sending the unmistakable message that Iraq had just been conquered, not liberated. This military is part of the same culturally sensitive occupation that thought it would be a good idea to get an NYU professor who had never been to Iraq to write the first draft of Iraq's Constitution, then unveiled a new blue-and-white Iraqi flag that looked remarkably like the Israeli flag (both schemes were scrapped due to public outrage). It's the same military that, in April, bombed Falluja's Abdel-Aziz al-Samarrai mosque and in August provoked the siege that damaged mosaics on the outer walls of Najaf's sacred Imam Ali Shrine.

Butler insists that he is not fighting Iraqi nationalists opposed to a foreign occupation but ruthless foreign jihadists who want to kill Americans for kicks. To bolster this claim, he cites an article in *Time* magazine about "the New Jihad." Yet the article in question makes no mention of Sadr, Najaf or the Mahdi Army; it is focused instead on a narrow subset of fighters in the Sunni Triangle. In Butler's case, this may be an honest mistake, but when the same line comes out of the White House, it is a clear strategy. Lumping regular Iraqis fighting occupation into the same "terrorist" category as Baathist holdouts and Al Qaeda sadists conveniently masks the unpleasant fact that US forces are now at war against the very people they supposedly invaded Iraq to liberate—not because they oppose elections, as Colin Powell claimed recently, but because they dared to demand them.

But never mind that. Now Butler claims that he is not fighting for the freedom of Iraqis but for me—so I "can continue to live in peace, free to grumble and dissent." Having been in the surgery wards and funeral processions of Sadr City on the mornings after US troops have done their peacekeeping, I can assure him that he is not making anyone safer. Not in Iraq, and not at home. ■

Aaron Maté provided research assistance for this column.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Enigma of Return

AMITAVA KUMAR

MAXIMUM CITY: Bombay Lost and Found.
By Suketu Mehta.
Knopf. 542 pp. $27.95.

In the largest exodus in recorded history, millions of refugees migrated across the brand new border after India was partitioned in 1947. A few months later, in January of 1948, a scriptwriter named Saadat Hasan Manto left behind Bombay, as the city was then called, and moved to Lahore, Pakistan. At the time of his departure from India, Manto was working for the well-known studio Bombay Talkies.

But Manto's main claim to fame was as a short-story writer. During his years in Bombay he had written with great relish about film stars and prostitutes and drinking. The horror of the partition compelled Manto to write about violence in a critical and graphic way. He had been tried for obscenity before, but in the new country where, like many Muslims, he had settled, Manto was called into court for what he had written about rape during the riots. By 1955 he was dead, just before he turned 43. But even during his difficult last years, suffering from persecution and poverty, Manto continued to write with nostalgia and affection about Bombay, the place from which he had been exiled: "That was the city I loved. That is the city I still love."

It is Manto's Bombay—a world of dirty realism with the lights shining on its painted surface—that is Suketu Mehta's inheritance. Mehta is a young writer who lives in New York, but Bombay is where he grew up. "When I moved to New York," he remembers, "I missed Bombay like an organ of my body." It might be nostalgia that led him back to Bombay, but Mehta's *Maximum City*, part reportage, part memoir, is more a narrative of discovery. The writer discovers the city of his past through the people who make up its present; he also gleans signs of what might be our global collective future.

Amitava Kumar is the author of Husband of a Fanatic, *forthcoming from the New Press in January.*

Mehta writes, "With 14 million people, Bombay is the biggest city on the planet of a race of city dwellers. Bombay is the future of urban civilization on the planet. God help us."

The book, like the city it describes, has multiple personalities. It is a documentary about a modern metropolis with its own signature features, starting with the sheer number of its inhabitants. On its opening page is the declaration: "There will soon be more people living in the city of Bombay than on the continent of Australia." Mehta is an urban ethnographer with an acute sensitivity to the peculiarities of his city. "The notion of what is a luxury and what is a basic need has been upended in Bombay," he writes. "Every slum I see in Jogeshwari has a television; antennas sprout in silver branches above the shanties. Many in the middle-class slum have motorcycles, even cars. People in Bombay eat relatively well, too, even the slum dwellers. The real luxuries are running water, clean bathrooms, and transport and housing fit for human beings."

Mehta discovers the city of his past through the people who make up its present, and gleans signs of what may be our global future.

Maximum City is also a memoir of migration across cities. At one point, Mehta describes how when he was in high school, his father had shouted at him, "When you were there, you wanted to come here. Now that you're here, you want to go back." This was in New York, but it doesn't really matter; it could have been Bombay. The episode made Mehta aware of a truth about himself: "It was when I first realized I had a new nationality: citizen of the country of longing."

But more than ethnography or memoir, *Maximum City* serves as a record of a writer's engagement with what is ordinarily regarded as low humanity. Mehta presents his empathetic accounts of meetings with what he calls "morally compromised people"—the gangsters of the Bombay underworld, rioters, brutal cops, murderers

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and prostitutes—alongside encounters with the city's rich and famous, including many well-known figures from the Bollywood film industry. Like Manto, Mehta finds his truths in the ways of a world that many other writers would find lacking in respect. Consider the Bombay beer bars where "fully clothed young girls dance on an extravagantly decorated stage to recorded Hindi film music, and men come to watch, shower money over their heads, and fall in love." The world of the beer bar is unique to Bombay, Mehta writes, "and for me it is the intersection of everything that makes the city fascinating: money, sex, love, death, and show business."

It is in a bar named Sapphire that Mehta befriends Monalisa, a fabulously beautiful and popular dance girl from Bombay's slums. Mehta writes that he was puzzled by the beer bars and couldn't understand why men spent such large amounts of money there: "On a good night a dancer in a Bombay bar can make twice as much as a high-class stripper in a New York bar. The difference is that the dancer in Bombay doesn't have to sleep with the customers, is forbidden to touch them in the bar, and wears more clothes on her body than the average Bombay secretary does on the broad public street." Monalisa provides an answer to that puzzle, and much besides. She draws him into her world, telling him of her failed tryst with the son of a Bombay don and explaining the tattoo of slash marks on her wrist. Monalisa says her dream is to win the Miss India pageant, so she can make a speech with millions of people watching. The speech would be in English, a language that she is working hard to acquire. She is going to say to the respectable audience, "I am a girl from the bar line. Now you can take back all your prizes, all your money, but I wanted to prove that I could get to this point. That we in the bar line are also part of society."

As much as the beer bar on any night in Bombay, *Maximum City* is full of stories of desire and vast wealth, sweat as well as liquor, beautiful bodies, scarred bodies, excitement and bright lights, and, of course, immense filth.

When Mehta went back to Bombay in 1998 with his wife and kids, twenty-one years after he had left, his foreign-born children began to suffer from a variety of illnesses. One of his sons contracted amebic dysentery. "The food and the water in Bombay, India's most modern city, are contaminated with shit. Amebic dysentery is transferred through shit. We have been feeding our son shit."

The hysterical realism of this passage, its mix of panic and exaggerated irony, is not unselfconscious. It doesn't simply reflect the tourist's nervous response to the sight of a man defecating in public in India. Rather, Mehta notes the obvious—he has seen men relieving themselves on the rocks by the sea every morning, and twice a day, when the tide washes out, he can smell from his window the stench that rises from those rocks and sweeps over the half-million-dollar flats that spread toward the east—and as a good journalist he goes and talks to people who can tell him more.

One of Mehta's informants is Prahlad Kakkar, who made *Bumbay*, "a film about shitting in the metropolis." Kakkar explains, "Half the population doesn't have a toilet to shit in, so they shit outside. That's five million people. If they shit half a kilo each, that's two and a half million kilos of shit each and every day. The real story is what you don't see in the film. There are no shots of women shitting. They have to shit between two and five each morning, because it's the only time they get privacy."

Drawn to 'morally compromised people,' Mehta finds his truths in the ways of a world other writers would find lacking in respect.

One can reasonably expect someone to ask if the writer proposes any solutions. He doesn't. Mehta dismisses as absurd the World Bank's proposal that the government build 100,000 public toilets. "I have seen public latrines in the slums," he writes. "None of them work. People defecate all around the toilets, because the pits have been clogged for months or years."

According to Mehta, the problem is that the Indians lack "civic sense." The private spaces are immaculate, the public ones intolerably dirty. As the government cannot make the physical city any better, it resorts to frequent changes in the names of its streets and crossroads. Perhaps the most notable change in the city's nomenclature was the decision by the right-wing Shiv Sena government that Bombay be called only by its Marathi name, "Mumbai." Mehta protests these changes as expressive of a desire "to go back not just to a past but to an idealized past, in all cases a Hindu past." The Shiv Sena leaders saw the name Bombay as a colonial imposition. But even the way in which the name of the Shiv Sena chief is spelled—Bal Thackeray ("Thakre" in Marathi)—has its origins in colonialism! Thackeray's father admired the English novelist who wrote *Vanity Fair*.

Mehta knows this too, but he seeks to complicate the picture further. He sees in the renaming of his beloved city the assertion of the poorer people in Bombay, the Maharashtrian ghatis, those people who for him had so far generically been the "servants." One is tempted to say that the city was taken back by those who don't have any toilets. As Mehta puts it, "This is how the ghatis took revenge on us. They renamed everything after their politicians, and finally they renamed even the city. If they couldn't afford to live on our roads, they could at least occupy the road signs."

The seething mob is a character in *Maximum City*: "All the accumulated insults, rebukes, and disappointments of life in a decaying megalopolis come out in a cathartic release of anger.... All of a sudden you feel powerful. You can take on anybody. It is not their city anymore, it is your city."

This movement of the masses can be threatening. An earlier visitor to Bombay, V.S. Naipaul, wrote in *An Area of Darkness* that he had found the crowd there unsettling. "There was nothing in my appearance or dress to distinguish me from the crowd eternally hurrying into Churchgate Station." Naipaul, born in Trinidad and educated in England, found that he was indistinguishable from the people in the crowd around him in Bombay. He felt faceless and felt he needed to set himself apart but didn't know how.

Mehta has a different epiphany, coincidentally at the same railway station. Although he also feels his individuality being crushed by the endless rush of bodies, Mehta discovers a vision of belonging. "All these ill-assorted people walking toward the giant clock on Churchgate: they are me; they are my body and my flesh. The crowd is the self, *14 million* avatars of it, *14 million* celebrations." It is tempting to view such a declaration as a direct response and even a resistance to the fear about the loss of the self amid the "white stream in and out of Churchgate Station" that Naipaul had described with such nervous accuracy. But it is just as probable that Mehta's response is overdetermined by Bombay's own recent history. After the razing of a mosque by Hindu zealots in a town in northern India in December 1992, riots broke out in Bombay. In January 1993, there were fresh clashes instigated by the Shiv Sena, and Muslims suffered terribly in that round of violence. Then, two months later, on March 12, which was a Friday, ten powerful bombs were detonated in the city by the Muslim underworld. *Maximum*

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GET READY!

back

"Worry" Cover Tees or Posters
Original artwork by Brian Stauffer on union-made full-color 100% cotton tee or glossy 18" x 24" poster

"Block Bush" Cover Tees or Posters
Original artwork by John Carr on union-made full-color 100% cotton tee or glossy 18" x 24" poster

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(union-made)
"Worry," our famous cover, 1" x 1½" rectangular; "He Lied. They Died." 1¾" round; "Pinocchio" cover, 1¾" round

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(union-made)
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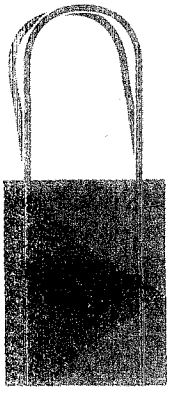

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12–18 Mo____ 18–24 Mo____

"Worry" S-Sleeve Tee(s) @ $20
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"Block Bush" S-Sleeve Tee(s) @ $20
Size: S___ M___ L___ X___ XX___

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"Block Bush" Poster(s) @ $15.

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____ ***The Nation* Tote(s) @ $10**
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____ **"He Lied. They Died." button @ $5**
____ **"Pinocchio" Bush Cover button @ $5**
____ **"Worry" Bush Cover button @ $5**
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City began as a report on the 1992–93 riots. Mehta's vision of 14 million celebrations of a single, indivisible self can be seen as an ideological but nevertheless hopeful response to the violence that has torn Bombay apart.

There is another way in which nothing human is alien to Mehta as a writer. He is comfortable in the company of murderers, or at least they are in his, since they offer him their stories. He asks a man who had set fire to a Muslim bread-seller during the riots, "What does a man look like when he's on fire?" The rioter tells the writer: "A man on fire gets up, falls, runs for his life, falls, gets up, runs.... It is horror. Oil drips from his body, his eyes become huge.... Oil drips from him, water drips from him, white, white all over."

Two years later Mehta goes back to talk to the same man to see what became of him after the riots, and finds that he has moved up in life and parlayed his way into respectable political circles. Tellingly, Mehta prefaces his return to the killer by stating simply, "A man who has murdered is not entirely defined by it. After he kills a human being, a large, perhaps the largest, part of him is a murderer, and it marks him off from most of the rest of humanity who are not; but that is not all that he is. He can also be a father, a friend, a patriot, a lover."

Such an understanding of human complexity allows Mehta to present life on the page with more integrity than a more judgmental approach would permit. A young, homeless poet from Bihar tells Mehta that "the footpath is the friend of the poor" because it provides so many people a place to sleep on; this youth finds it remarkable that ditch water, black with sewage, is used to grow spinach in Bombay. So does Mehta. And his narrative carries the full burden, it seems, of the homeless youth's experience. This fidelity to his interlocutors, and to their detail and circumstance, as much as the intelligence and brightness of Mehta's own prose, makes *Maximum City* an extraordinary debut—a debut that will rival Arundhati Roy's in fiction. ■

The Human Stain

JOHN BANVILLE

KAFKA. By Nicholas Murray. Yale. 440 pp. $30.

The question has been asked: Was Franz Kafka human? He seems to have had doubts himself. Many of his most persuasive and most affecting literary representatives are animals: a burrowing mole, or Josefina the mouse singer, or poor Gregor Samsa, who wakes up one morning to find he has been transformed into a beetle. The creator of these changelings was himself an amorphous creature. Although photographs are not to be trusted—the camera always lies—it is remarkable how varied are the images we have of this singular man. The svelte and slightly sinister fiancé in the engagement portrait with Felice Bauer taken in 1917, and the pigeon-toed clerk in hat and overcoat pictured with his sister Ottla in the same year—who would take them for the same person? And the cool aesthete in the photo he sent to Felice in 1912—"I don't actually have a twisted face, I only have a visionary gaze when taken with a flash"—surely this is not the same Franz Kafka we see in a snapshot from his student days, dreamy and faintly comical in a bowler hat?

He looked like no one but himself. One searches the family portraits for resemblances and finds hardly a trace. His father was a mustachioed merchant with a big, square head; his mother was fish-faced and mannish. Only in Ottla, the beloved sister, do we detect a likeness. He was six feet tall and not quite 140 pounds; at that time and in that place he would have been a beanpole, head and shoulders above most Praguers. Yet in his endless and agonized self-scrutiny there is no mention of self-consciousness in the matter of height. On the contrary, he seems quietly gratified to be so tall.

Such gratification was rare. For the most part his life was a shimmer of guilt, that ineradicable, universal and almost depersonalized guilt that weighed him down and at the same time made him light enough to float away into the airiest reaches of literary art. He would have appreciated what Beckett recalled a doctor saying of a girl who had died young, that she had not been properly born. "My life," Kafka wrote, "is a hesitation before birth." He fantasized continually about the ways in which he might be done away with. The conjunction of metal and flesh in particular obsessed him. Famously, he celebrated the morning when he had "after a long time the joy of imagining a knife twisted in my heart"; he imagined "a sausage maker's knife which through one side enters the body with great speed and mechanical regularity." With a kind of devilish glee he devises for himself ever more terrible punishments, tortures, eviscerations.

> I am being dragged toward the windows on the ground floor of a house by means of a rope around my neck, and I am lifted, bleeding and dismembered, without regard, as if by someone who is inattentive, through all the ceilings of the rooms, the furniture, walls and attics, until high above on the roof appears only the empty noose, as the shattering of the roof tiles has destroyed even my remains.

And when he was gone, he felt, taking his work with him—he commanded his friend Max Brod to destroy his writings after his death—all that would outlive him would be the shame.

How much of this is real guilt, real torment, real self-loathing? Who speaks these terrible abjurations, Kafka the man or Kafka the artist? Pietro Citati, who has written the greatest of all books on Kafka, has him declaring: "'I am like you, I am a man like you, I suffer and rejoice as you do,'" yet smiling "like a meticulous and buoyant angel," a being who lives "far away, very far away, in a world that did not belong even to him." This is the Kafka of whom might be said what was said of Nietzsche, that he lived in a place where no one else lived.

Nicholas Murray, the latest of Kafka's many biographers, brings a healthy skepticism to the question of his subject's sufferings. Of "the real Kafka, the 27-year-old accident-insurance lawyer in the Prague summer of 1910," he writes: "The hopelessly introverted, damaged, lonely bachelor of his private fictional fantasies seems hard to square with the external reality of his life at this time." He had a secure and well-paid job, had the privacy of his room to write in without interruption, was the center of a circle of loyal friends, and had begun to publish work the quality and originality of which was acknowledged by a small but influential number of critics; yet like his beloved Heinrich von Kleist, he was forever declaring that there was no help for him on this earth. Why so much self-pity, why the constant refusal to grapple with the ordinary business of liv-

John Banville is the author, most recently, of Shroud *(Knopf), a novel, and* Prague Pictures: Portraits of a City *(Bloomsbury), an essay.*

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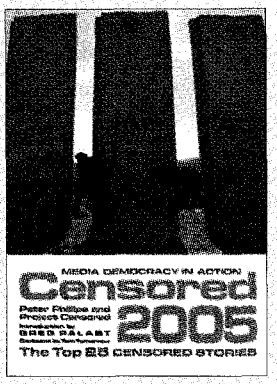

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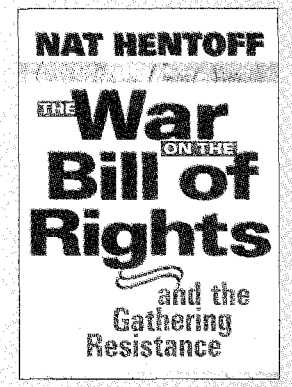

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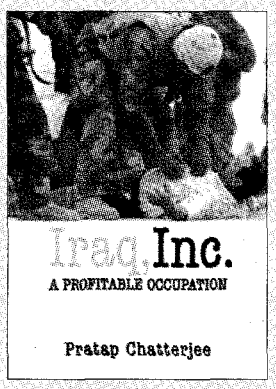

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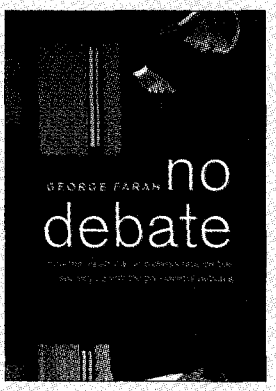

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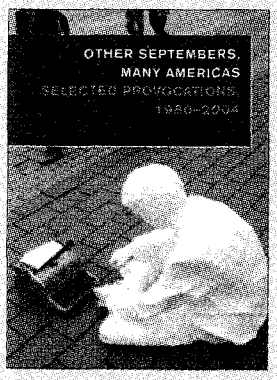

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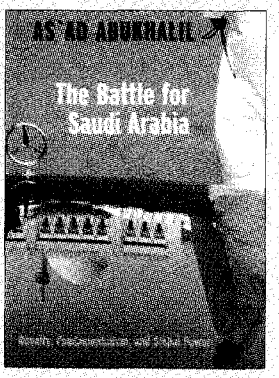

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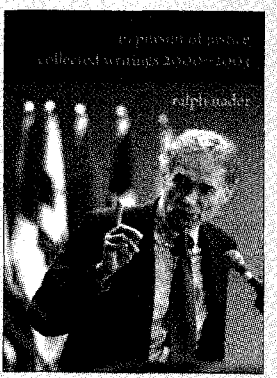

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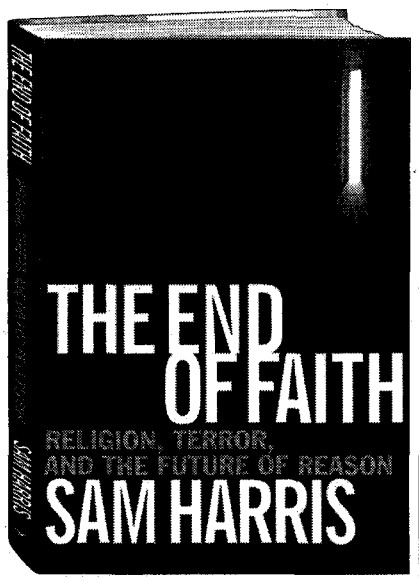

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ing? His biographer sometimes loses all patience: "It is highly unlikely that Franz Kafka could boil an egg."

And then there were the girls. Throughout his short life, Kafka never lacked for romance. Women found him immensely attractive, despite his insecurity and self-doubt and general deprecation of sexual passion—a diary entry reads: "Coitus as punishment for the happiness of being together." Wherever he went, on business trips, on visits to spas, even in his sojourns in hospital, he picked up girls as a magnet picks up iron filings. Staying at the fashionable health resort of Marienbad in the summer of 1916, he confided to his journal:

> What a muddle I've been in with girls, in spite of all my headaches, insomnia, grey hair [he was 33], despair. Let me count them: there have been at least six since the summer. I can't resist, my tongue is fairly torn from my mouth if I don't give in and admire anyone who is admirable and love her until admiration is exhausted. With all six my guilt is almost wholly inwards.

The exact nature of his relations with these women, indeed, with all of his women, including his long-suffering fiancée Felice Bauer, and his late loves Milena Jesenská and Dora Diamant, is uncertain. His sexual drive seems to have been locked in low gear. He had too, as Murray points out, the good bourgeois's horror of sullying himself with females plucked from the lower orders. He was 20 when he lost, or was deprived of, his virginity. He took a shop girl, whose name he did not record, to a hotel in Prague's Malá Strana district. The experience was "charming, exciting, and horrible," and afterward, walking home over the Charles Bridge, "I was actually happy, but this happiness came from the fact that at last I had some peace from the ever-yearning body, and above all it came from relief that the whole experience hadn't been more horrible, more obscene." The girl's memory lingered, or at least the memory of what he had done with her lingered, and became another one among his many torments:

> My body, sometimes quiet for years, would...be shaken to the point of not being able to bear it by this desire for a small, a very specific abomination, for something slightly disgusting, embarrassing, obscene, even in the best that existed for me there was something of it, some small nasty smell, some sulphur, some hell.

Kafka turned a version of this sexual revulsion upon his immediate family. Home life for him was an unending agony, with parents and sisters making their noises around him, eating their meals, diffusing their smells—a glimpse of his parents' nightgowns laid out on the foot of their bed filled him with disgust. He hid in his room, "the noise headquarters of the entire apartment," as he called it in his diary, the only place where, with pen in hand, he considered himself to be truly alive: "I am nothing but literature...and can and want to be nothing else." Yet not for a moment would he consider moving out to a place of his own, which he surely could have afforded. He was tied to the things he hated, or claimed to hate, like Prometheus lashed to his rock.

His affair, if that is the word, with Felice Bauer was another source of suffering. It was an extraordinary relationship, and in the history of difficult loves is similar only to, and perhaps half modeled on, Kierkegaard's on-off engagement to Regine Olsen. Kafka revered Kierkegaard—"He bears me out like a friend"—and took comfort from the example of the Dane's final rejection of Regine and the very idea of marrying. Yet Kafka, writhing in his loneliness, longed for what he knew he must renounce. Pietro Citati writes: "He had only to see a table with two chairs and a smaller one to think that he would never occupy one of those chairs with wife and child, and to experience a desperate desire for that joy."

The most remarkable thing about Felice Bauer, in relation to Kafka, is the fact that she was, so far as we can see, entirely unremarkable; as Murray puts it, she was "solidly middle class," and more interested in soft furnishings than in literature. The two encountered each other for the first time in August 1912, at the home of Max Brod's parents. She lived in Berlin, where she worked for a firm that manufactured dictating machines—a job Kafka might have invented for one of his female characters, that debauched and downtrodden band. After she had returned home they began a correspondence that was to continue for years, and through many misunderstandings and tribulations, until the famous "tribunal in the hotel" of July 12, 1914, when Kafka was confronted at the Askanischer Hof in Berlin by a thoroughly frustrated and vexed Felice, accompanied by her sister and a friend, the three of them "trooping into his hotel room," Murray writes, "like a prosecution team entering a courtroom." Kafka, although aghast, observed the proceedings with his usual beady candor: Felice "patted her hair with her hand, wiped her nose, yawned. Suddenly she gathered herself together and said very studied, hostile things she had long been saving up."

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Kafka's work, Maurice Blanchot observes, "is not always only literary. Salvation is an enormous preoccupation with him, all the stronger because it is hopeless, and all the more hopeless because it is totally uncompromising." It is no accident that shortly after the ordeal at the Askanischer Hof, Kafka set to work on *The Trial*, which begins, "Somebody must have made a false accusation against Josef K."

A certain symmetry was in operation here. Two years before, just after he had met Felice for the first time, Kafka sat down at his desk at 10 o'clock on the night of September 22, 1912, and wrote without a break until 6 AM. The next day he described the experience:

> I was hardly able to pull my legs out from under the desk, they had got so stiff from sitting. The fearful strain and joy, how the story developed before me, as if I were advancing over water. Several times during this night I heaved my own weight on my back. How everything can be said, how for everything, for the strangest fancies, there waits a great fire in which they perish and rise up again.

The story he completed that night was "The Judgement," the breakthrough work that convinced him at last of the validity of his artistic vocation. It is a highly autobiographical text—"thoughts about Freud, of course," Kafka noted—in which, Murray writes, "the looming presence...of Georg Bendemann's father echoes the overwhelming presence in Kafka's life of his own father." At the close of the story the father commands the son to drown himself, and Georg eagerly complies. "The alternative to slaying the father," Murray shrewdly observes, "is self-destruction."

In a sense, art was for Kafka a means of immolating the self. He disappears into his writing like snow falling on water. What other great writer has written with such clarity, directness, simplicity and, above all, such impersonality? Erich Heller, one of Kafka's closest readers, speaks of the "ruthlessly compelling logic" of his writing. Kafka, according to Heller, "is the least problematic of modern writers," whose "thinking is a reflex movement of his being and shares the irrefutability of all that is."

> Like sorrow in the tenth of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, despair is given a home of its own in Kafka's works, faithfully made in the image of customary life, but animated by the blast of the curse. This gives to Kafka's writings their unique quality. Never before has absolute darkness been represented with so much clarity, and the very madness of desperation with so much composure and sobriety.

Surely it is this sense of absolute and terrible calm that convinces us Kafka is speaking directly to us, and about us, and about our world.

Murray notes that there have been dissenting voices in the matter of Kafka's reputation, which Edmund Wilson, for instance, considered "wildly overdone," describing *The Trial* and *The Castle* as "rather ragged performances," which are damaged by not having been finished or properly worked out in the first place. There is something to this argument. Many, including the present writer, believe that Kafka is at his greatest not in the novels but in the short stories, the parables and even, or especially, in the diaries.

Nicholas Murray, scrupulous as ever, does not join this argument. His biography is eminently sensible on a subject about which much high-flown transcendental nonsense has been written. He gives a good, straightforward account of the life, and of the work. Where Kafka's self-condemnations are concerned, he lays out the evidence and leaves the judgments to others. His portrait is all the more moving

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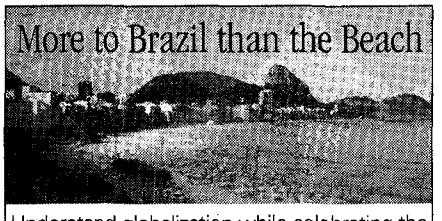

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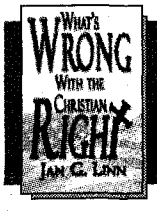

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for the measured fashion in which it is executed. Murray's Kafka is thoroughly human and yet more than human, too, one of those whom Kafka himself had in mind when he wrote: "No people sing with such pure voices as those who live in deepest Hell; what we take for the song of the angels is their song." ■

This Canadian Life

D.T. MAX

NATASHA And Other Stories. By David Bezmozgis. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 147 pp. $18.

The reviewer's galley of *Natasha*, David Bezmozgis's short-story collection about a Russian émigré family in Toronto, begins with words not from the writer but the publisher. "The summer before last," writes the editor of the collection, "on a park bench in Union Square, a friend handed me a typescript of the story "Natasha".... [The author] had never sent his work to agents or magazine editors." This anecdote, so reminiscent of the exchanges of *samizdat* manuscripts in the old Soviet Union, makes the reader hold his breath with excitement. Will Bezmozgis's book be special? Forbidden in some way? Or at least out of the ordinary? Alas, there is no reason I can see why Bezmozgis had been hitherto shut out of the American short-story mill. This is a slim, well-observed collection, but it lacks span or muscle. Critics have mentioned *Natasha* in the same breath with Nathan Englander's remarkable *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*, but it doesn't bear comparison. It lacks the intelligence of that book, its inventiveness and its commitment to memory. While *Natasha* covers the same territory, the wave of horrors the Jews suffered in the last century, it is just another short-story collection, a standard product of the American short-story sensibility, a prisoner of a form that has become as ossified as nineteenth-century opera.

Take the second story in the collection, "Roman Berman, Massage Therapist." "Roman Berman" is narrated by Roman's son Mark. Roman had trained weight lifters in Riga, a prestige occupation. But in Toronto he works at a chocolate factory and gives massages after hours. He has gotten a masseur's license, passing an exam in a language that "was more an enemy than an instrument." Now he finds that he lacks that most Western of skills, the ability to build a business. The Bermans are not religious, but having grown up in the USSR, they recognize authority. So Roman and his son go to a local rabbi, who tells the father to advertise. They leaflet the neighborhood.

One leaflet reaches Harvey Kornblum, a doctor. Kornblum invites the Berman family to dinner. They assume the doctor is a step on the way to business success, though of what sort they can't be sure. They arrive, overdressed, with an apple cake Mark's mother has baked. Already waiting is another Canadian Jewish couple, Jerry and Shirley, and another overdressed immigrant couple with a child. The Kornblums and their circle collect émigré Jews; it makes them feel generous and their friends admire it. "This was 1983," as Mark notes, and Jewish émigrés are still "a cause.... We had good PR. We could trade on our history."

The dinner that follows is a series of small incomprehensions. Jerry shows the Bermans pictures of his relatives who died in the Holocaust, trying to remind himself that history matters. This is what the Bermans are trying to forget. The apple cake Mrs. Berman baked is declined. The Kornblums, it turns out, are kosher. Too Jewish for Russia, the Bermans are not Jewish enough for Toronto. Mark espies his father giving Mrs. Kornblum a freebie workover in her bra. The implication is not sexual, but unsexing.

"Roman Berman" has its moments. It's a good illustration of the Bermans' complicated predicament in the New World, where they do not fit neatly into any of the categories that could help them: They are less refuseniks than economic refugees. They got out of Russia by claiming they wanted to go to Israel, a fact they don't mention to the Kornblums. Trading on PR is a tricky business. The upset a young boy feels at the impotence of his parents—a stock moment in short stories, to be sure—is nicely carried forward. But the story, like the rest in *Natasha*, is of the extended vignette variety. Let me introduce you to a world; let me

D.T. Max, a frequent contributor to The New York Times Magazine, *will publish* The Dark Eye: A Scientific and Cultural History of Mad Cow and Other Prion Diseases *in fall 2005.*

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show you a small moment of pain in it. There is no energy or surprise to the close, just light sadness. "My mother handed [the apple cake] to me and pointed down the street toward a Dumpster," the story concludes. "She did not need to say to run."

Mark is at the center of all the stories in this collection, and I think he's the problem. He begins in the first story as a boy and ends in the last as a man. His psychological development is the traditional one in reverse: He begins experienced and ends innocent. He starts a tiny, wide-eyed witness to the century and winds up naïve, cosseted, protected by the cushion of Western rights and objects he learns to take for granted. That Mark goes from at least potentially interesting to typical could, in another writer's hands, be a great strength. Here it's a weakness, a weight on Bezmozgis—what can you do with someone whose main goal is not to see too well or feel too much?

The title story exemplifies the problem. Midway through his life—and through the collection—Mark meets Natasha, a 14-year-old Russian girl, tough beyond her years. We are in the 1990s. The Bermans have made some money and moved to the suburbs, the wolf no longer at the door. The bear is gone too. There is no more USSR. "Russia is shit," says Natasha, "but people enjoy themselves." She has no more moral right to be in North America than, say, a Swahili or a Dutchman. She's with Mark because Mark's uncle has married her mother, Zina, more or less sight unseen. Mark is living the life of an alienated Western teenager, in his parents' basement. "I smoked hash, watched television, read, and masturbated," he says. Natasha sees Mark's situation and knows what he needs. "I've done it a hundred times," she says. "If you want, I'll do it with you." She climbs onto his mattress.

Natasha needs Mark to get her away from her mother, but he's too inert to be a good pawn. During a key confrontation, when Natasha needs saving from her mother, Mark retreats. He lacks all commitment. Natasha, using the only power she has, sleeps with his uncle, breaking Mark's heart and ending his uncle's marriage to her mother. Natasha winds up with the local hash dealer Rufus, whom she'd met through Mark. Her interest, unlike Mark's, isn't in the rebellious aspect of dealing but the economic one. Rufus lives well. When she'd first met him, Mark noticed her casting her cool eyes on his "spotless kitchen, the copper cookware, the living room with matching leather sofas, the abstract art on the walls." Mark's scruffy basement doesn't compare. You imagine Natasha's mind was made up even then. If she was going to fall, she would land on her feet.

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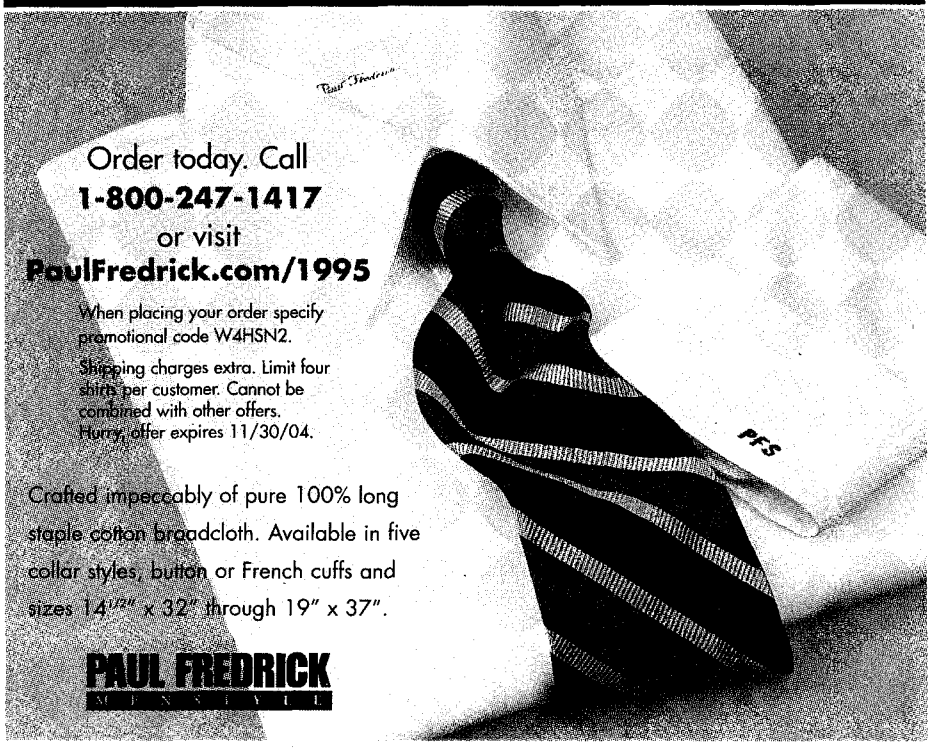

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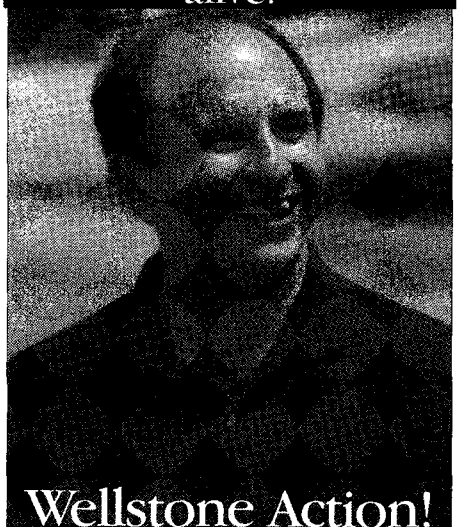

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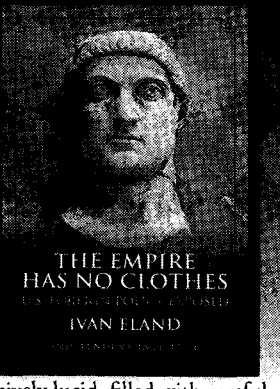

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like all the stories in the collection, "Natasha" seems derived from the author's own experience: David Bezmozgis came with his parents to Toronto in 1980, more or less as Mark did. Filling in the stories not written in the collection, one can imagine Mark's hash-smoking dropout phase ending and his going on to a college his parents disapprove of, a Bard or Skidmore, and then, after a stint in, say, a Brooklyn band, becoming the author. Enter the editor in the park. The journey, seen cynically, is from an authority Bezmozgis cannot respect, his parents, toward one he can, the MFAs of America. Somewhere on the journey he learned to write like everyone else.

At this point in our literary history, you don't have to get an MFA to write as if you did: You only have to read *The Best American Short Stories* or comparable collections. If *Natasha* smells of Bezmozgis's own experience, it reeks of the tricks of the writing-school class—the nice observations, the tucked-in detail that will later come back to matter, the story's end that resolves the practical but not the emotional action of the story. Of all the Russians, Bezmozgis has learned most from Chekhov, the most Europeanized of Russian writers and the one most admired in writing schools here. He has learned Chekhov's trick of opening up a story by putting a window at the end that proves in reality to be a mirror. "In the full light of summer, I looked into darkness," Mark concludes in "Natasha." "It was the end of my subterranean life." What exactly does Mark make of Natasha's treachery beyond feeling resentful? That, in the modern way, is left to us to work out.

The modern short story, of course, is not reinvented by each writer. Still, there is something upsetting in seeing its timid grace spread to the great events that made Jews Westerners. Roman Berman and his family are the heirs of the Jews of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, but they have lost the full-blooded response of the Schearls in Roth's great novel. There are many objective reasons why this might be so. 1984 isn't 1907. The Schearls were part of a movement of millions, the Bermans one of a handful. And the Bermans feel a sense of shame at having shirked their stated destination of Israel. Finally, of course, the West has changed. Mark goes into the basement, while David Schearl goes to the museum. There's symbolic meaning to that.

Ultimately, though, the timidity of the book does not seem to me to be the timidity of the modern immigrant but the tentativeness of the modern short-story writer. The relationship between style and moment is complex, but it is not hard to imagine Bezmozgis on his journey from refugee to acclaimed first story writer under pressure—not Soviet pressures but the quieter pressures of fictional models—to conform, to adapt, to tell the story their way. This ending of "Natasha," they say: Don't give us Mark's thoughts. Just give us an image that captures those thoughts, the image of him looking into the basement from which he emerged. Don't embrace any character too closely, and don't describe any emotion too intensely. Be bored with being bored. It is perhaps a necessary paradox of the process that *Natasha* has become a highly celebrated story collection, a set of instructions for the next short-story writer who wants to "break in."

There's a story in the collection that sounds a different note. In "An Animal to the Memory," Mark is a student in the seventh grade at a Toronto Hebrew school. The time is after "Roman Berman, Massage Therapist" but before "Natasha." Mark is in Hebrew school because a discount is still offered to immigrants, a last gasp of refusenik life as cause célèbre. Mark hates Hebrew school and hates being identified as a Jew. As a result, he has become "a tough little bastard," affecting "a hoodlum persona." He is suspended for pounding Jerry Ackerman's head against the ground. "Congratulations," his Jewish friends in secular school tease him. "You're the toughest kid in Hebrew school."

Mark is readmitted the week of Holocaust Remembrance Day. On this day, the basement of the school is transformed by the principal, a fearsome man named Gurvich, whose father was a concentration camp survivor, into a museum of the Holocaust, complete with "photos of Jews in cattle cars, starving Jews in ghettos, naked Ukrainian Jews waiting at the edge of an open trench...sculptures of flaming Stars of David, sculptures of piles of shoes, sculptures of sad bearded Polish rabbis." The principal's father is there to inscribe copies of his memoir with the words: "*Yizkor; al tishkach!* Remember; don't forget."

What can Mark's rebellion signify amid this horror? Ackerman finds his moment for revenge and shoves Mark into the glass candle that commemorates the dead from Czechoslovakia. It breaks, a new *Kristallnacht*. Mark pounces on Ackerman's friend and chokes him. Mark had been threatened with expulsion if he repeated his animal-like behavior, but the punishment he gets is worse. Gurvich takes him down alone to the museum, where, grabbing him by the neck, he forces him to yell "I'm a Jew" until he dissolves into tears. "I was standing in the middle of the hallway...while Gurvich nodded his rabbinical head at me," Mark remembers. "When he was done nodding, he turned away and opened the double doors leading up to the stairs. Halfway out, before closing the doors, Gurvich looked back to where I hadn't moved. "Now, Berman, he said, now maybe you understand what it is to be a Jew."

"An Animal to the Memory" is not subtle like the other stories in this collection. Maybe that I prefer it is just a version of the mistake Jerry makes when he pulls out his Holocaust album—Reviewer to Bezmogis: be more Jewish. It is a luxury of the living to think about the dead. But "An Animal to the Memory" takes on a moral responsibility the other stories in this collection don't. It says that while characters are free to act as they please, the writer, like Gurvich, cannot. He cannot ignore horror and take his pleasure in small things. Big events require a bigger response until there is no one left to remember them. "An Animal to the Memory" answers the question every writer in Bezmozgis's shoes should be asking, the one that to my mind Nathan Englander took on with such commitment: When the generations of Jews who were victimized by the totalitarian despots of the mid-twentieth century die off, how will we remember them? ■

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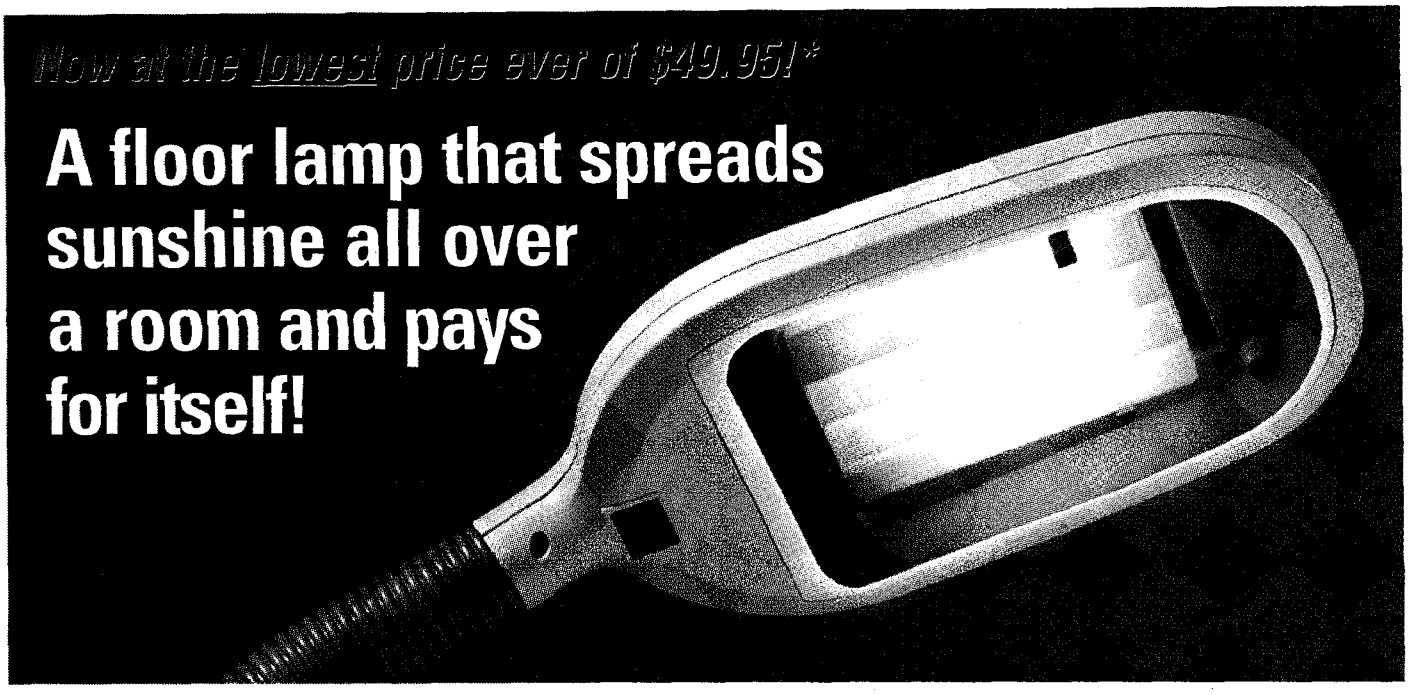

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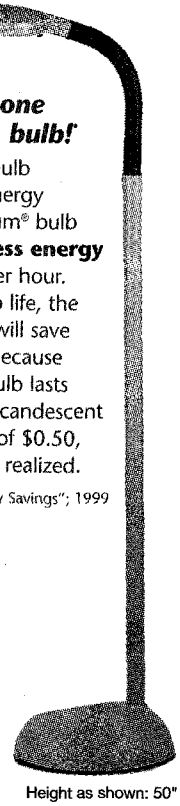

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FILMS

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STUART KLAWANS

TARNATION • SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW • THE TAKE

Fussing repetitively with a lock of blond hair, nervously flashing an incomplete set of front teeth, the figure on screen begins to cough up her "testimony" in the accents of a Southern trailer court. The story that spills from her sounds all too familiar—the boot in her stomach while she was pregnant, the gun muzzle shoved against her head, the sound of her husband shouting, "I'm gonna kill you, bitch!"—but the speaker herself is a novelty, and is perhaps more devastating than any incident she relates. "Hillary," as she calls herself, is actually an 11-year-old Houston boy named Jonathan Caouette. You are watching a scene he improvised in 1984 before a home videocamera.

Few boys his age would have chosen this character for their role-playing, or could even have conceived of her. What's heartbreaking about Jonathan—and impressive—is that he turned himself into Hillary with true conviction. How did a kid get access to such emotions? By the time this scrap of footage comes up in Caouette's sensational film-memoir *Tarnation*, you know the unfortunate answer, having experienced the beginnings of his story and his mother's.

A New York–based actor and filmmaker who is now in his early 30s, Caouette put *Tarnation* together from some twenty years' worth of his home videos, plus scrapbook photographs, audiocassette diaries, saved answering-machine tapes, favorite pop songs, clips from movies and TV shows and a few sections of recently shot footage (both documentary and staged). Emerging from this assemblage—which is more collage than montage—are three stories in one: Caouette's tales of the calamities of a lower-middle-class household, the education of a Texas gay boy and the formation, at last, of a redemptive new family.

The original family, it turns out, was Jewish, which puts *Tarnation* into a category with *Capturing the Friedmans* as a demolisher of stereotypes. Caouette's maternal grandparents, the Davises, appear to have been presentable enough when young, but throughout *Tarnation* they come across as toothless, impecunious, crotchety and ignorant—so ignorant that when their only child, Renee, suffered an ill-defined sickness at the start of her teen years, they turned her over to psychiatrists for a prolonged course of electroconvulsive therapy. Softened up by the experience, and also (no doubt) by the hippie drug culture that had reached Houston, Renee entered her 20s as a disaster-prone single mother with a long record of hospitalizations. She was unable to hold on to Jonathan, who began his career in foster homes at the age of 4 and would eventually go on his own tour of mental hospitals, thanks to some PCP-laced reefers and his grandparents' willingness to sign forms.

I don't hesitate to put all this into writing, because you would have to read it anyway in *Tarnation*. The film's information—or the part of it that can be paraphrased—generally takes the form of texts, projected on a plain background or, more often, superimposed on the images. Although these words show up less frequently as *Tarnation* goes on, they also help pull together the other two parts of the film: Caouette's memories of gay teen life in Houston, which he lived as a punk-rock boy (and sometimes a Goth girl); and the real-life drama of his assuming responsibility for his mother and bringing her to live in New York, in the household he'd established with his lover, David.

The stories you get from the texts are crucial to *Tarnation*; they explain material such as the Hillary videotape and allow you to feel its impact. But even though the texts often dominate the images and sounds, they also have a way of merging with them, so that the written words become yet another element in the collage. In the first section of the film, for example, the texts have a fairy-tale quality, with their account of a beautiful young princess betrayed and brought low. They allow you some distance from the film's most harrowing material, which through them becomes almost dreamlike. (In fact, *Tarnation* begins with a staged scene in New York, in which Caouette tells David that he's just had a strange dream about his mother.) In the final, most hopeful section of the film, by contrast, the texts are terse. Their effect here is rhythmic more than informative; they punctuate the scenes, repeatedly bringing them back to the matter-of-fact.

If I were to think of a comparison to *Tarnation*—an unfair one—it would be with Su Friedrich's autobiographical masterpiece, *Sink or Swim*, in which the words sometimes carry the emotional weight of the story (about Friedrich's troubled relationship with her father) and sometimes provide it with a riddling, ironic counterpoint. The difference is that Friedrich's film contains its overpowering emotions within a rigorous structure. It's cerebral, allusive and visually crisp, even while being confessional; whereas *Tarnation* splats and throbs over the screen in bruised-fruit colors, psychedelic patterns and post-Warholian confrontations with physiognomy.

The explanation of how Caouette achieved these effects is almost as important to the film as the story of Renee's shock therapy. He made *Tarnation* using iMovie editing software, which he discovered was a standard feature of his lover's new Apple computer. Other people use iMovie to create little retrospective videos for weddings or bar mitzvahs; Caouette found in it a tool for organizing his vast personal archive, not so much ordering it as shaping it into a simulacrum of his roiling memories, dreams and impressions. In interviews and within the film itself, Caouette has said he suffers from depersonalization disorder, which leaves him experiencing his own life as if he were watching a movie. You could describe the associative, variegated, expressionistic flow of *Tarnation* as a re-creation of this mental state; or, just as reasonably, you could say it's a product of iMovie's limited repertoire of special effects. The program is good at multiple images, grids, superimpositions, strobe effects, kaleidoscopic distortions and solarization, all of which Caouette used with a lavish hand.

The film's supporters—please add me to the list—have perhaps made too much of the Apple computer backstory. Maybe, lacking iMovie, Caouette would not have begun to make *Tarnation*. Certainly, without iMovie, he could not have assembled the initial epic-length cut, working single-handed on a $218 budget, in time for the 2003 MIX Festival. The MIX screening led to the rest of the success story: a rapturously received showing of the current eighty-eight-minute cut at the 2004 Sundance Festival, followed by inclusion in the 2004 New York Film Festival and a nation-

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wide theatrical release (beginning October 6 at Film Forum). So was iMovie helpful? Did it guide Caouette's directorial decisions to some degree? The answers, clearly, are yes. But does *Tarnation* therefore represent a new era of personal filmmaking, as claimed by producer Stephen Winter (of the MIX Festival) and the executive producers, John Cameron Mitchell and Gus Van Sant? I doubt it—and to make the point, I would compare *Tarnation* not only to earlier works such as *Sink or Swim* (an utterly handmade, noncomputerized film) but also to a current Paramount release, which was temporarily the country's box-office champion: *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*.

Because the writer-director of *Sky Captain*, Kerry Conran, created virtually all of the settings and events in the computer, shooting nothing in the real world except for his costumed actors posed against a blue screen, the producers began saying months ago that they, too, had achieved a cinematic breakthrough, a claim that many journalists uncritically echoed. I must confess here that I assisted in this hype, reporting in advance on a very minor feature of *Sky Captain* for the sake of a byline in the *New York Times*. Like other mainstream publications, the *Times* seldom gets excited about artworks in themselves; it prefers to see them as occasions for business stories, or for features on technological innovation (which then become business stories). Newspapers and magazines have therefore been all over *Sky Captain*, since its creation involved the heavy use of gizmos and the realization, according to the producers, of great economies in filmmaking.

But the facts, like the movie itself, are less than thrilling. The computer-generated imagery in *Sky Captain* differs not in kind but in quantity—and even in that category, it doesn't push ahead by much. (See *The Phantom Empire*, or Sam Raimi's *Army of Darkness*. For that matter, see *The Age of Innocence*.) The only worthwhile question concerns the use that Conran made of his digital toys.

The answer: Whereas Caouette employed the computer for mind-blown underground-cinema effects (plus some music-video-style lip-syncing), Conran went for the retro-futurist look. *Sky Captain* takes place on the eve of World War II—or, rather, in a world of serials and sci-fi programs made in that era—and so boasts a hazy, color-drained, Art Deco Manhattan, in which dirigibles dock at the Empire State Building and searchlights are forever cutting through the sky. By its nature, such architecture adapts well to a computer-based blue-screen technique, which favors big jumps in scale between the foreground (where you find the actors) and the background (where the feet of colossal robots are stomping vintage cars). I thought the pictures in *Sky Captain* were handsome—as a writer-director, Conran makes a good production designer—and that the period setting was a splendid excuse to put Gwyneth Paltrow and Jude Law into slouch hats and trench coats. When costumes and surroundings are faithfully recycled from the 1930s, they may have the charm of the old. The same cannot be said for plots, characterizations and dialogue.

After much ballyhoo, *Sky Captain* turns out to be a mildly pleasant curiosity, which is marketable not as a result of its computer effects but because of its clichés. When you put down your money at the box office, you know exactly what you're buying. *Tarnation*, though destined for a different and smaller audience, turns out to be compelling, absorbing and completely unpredictable. You may know the story when you buy your ticket, but you won't be able to guess from one moment to the next what will pop up on the screen.

As for the opinions expressed in this review: I wrote them down with a computer, but they would have been the same if I'd used a pen.

The Nation's own Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis have written and directed a fine documentary called *The Take*, about the movement by Argentine workers to seize abandoned factories and put them back into use as cooperatives. The film sketches a brief history of neoliberal economics in Argentina—first the large-scale privatizations of the 1990s, which enriched the top tier of the populace, and then the large-scale outflow of this wealth, which left everyone else busted—and then reports in detail on the response of one group of workers, who broke back into their padlocked auto-parts factory, Forja San Martín. To the filmmakers' credit, they don't make this exercise in anarcho-syndicalism seem easy. Political differences surface within the occupied factory (which the workers have to guard around the clock), and the film's hunky but soft-hearted hero, co-operative leader Freddy Espinosa, dwells often on the strains inflicted on his family. *The Take* stands out as activist, made-for-TV filmmaking with an honest texture and real intellectual sophistication. In New York City, it is showing at Film Forum (with sponsorship from *The Nation*) through October 5. ■

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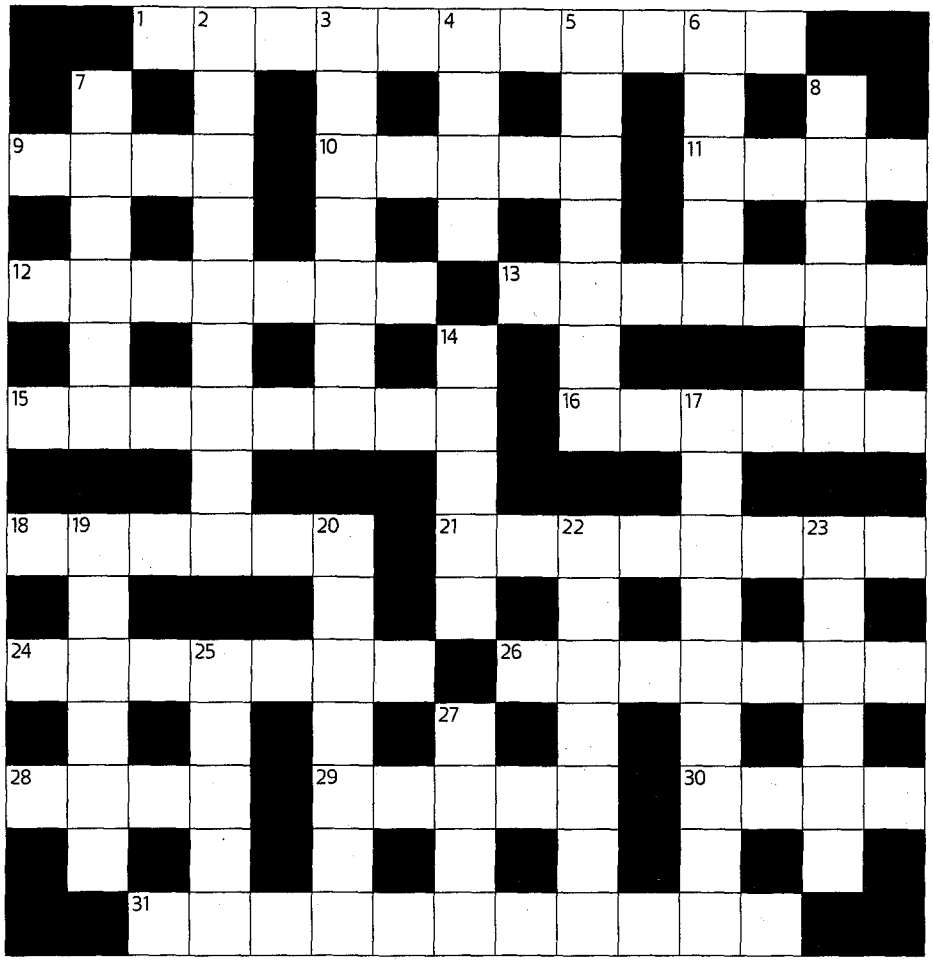

ACROSS

1 Look twice here! (It's a rather "biblical" way of saying "this is the consequence!") (2,3,6)

9, 10 and **11** The people-like descendants of gloomy-colored dogs for those running around the track. (9,4)

12 Leaning slightly in the direction of giving out gratuities? (7)

13 Understands, according to the hipster, about what might be set for summaries of reading matter—or works on what might be taken in. (7)

15 Proving one who takes another's life is doubly foolish to get in here. (8)

16 With the head twisted, such hiding places would become measurable. (6)

18 Part of the meal served in your neighbor's church? (6)

21 Things the elf might drive might fit into your boot. (8)

24 Describing 31, with a circle around the propeller. (7)

26 The little tot goes to only three-quarters of the big city, where you expect to see a much older one. (7)

28 Continent, like a symbol of deferment. (4)

29 See 6 down

30 This appears on official documents in England to show how to measure the power you have. (4)

31 An interesting time for our country, which in years will be a wild-oats period for the young. (3,8)

DOWN

2 My old Pa is rather decrepit, but for periods of four years made this. (9)

3 See 23

4, 14 and **27** The Tuaregs were so angry this way! (4,2,3,4)

5 Had a rainstorm, and built a wall. (7)

6 and **29** across One might need this to weigh an elephant of such great proportions. (5,5)

7 Perhaps expresses what the good athlete does, to work very hard, bottom to top! (6)

8 Tell Tom to go away when he is at the bottom of it—and attack him severely this way. (6)

14 See 4

17 Sometimes they call this funny, with a peculiar pattern and sort of ebon as part of the limb. (5,4)

19 The boot is made to fit for the player of what Danny Kaye considered an ill wind which no one blows good. (6)

20 Mouthpiece and earpiece at different ends of it, as the fancy type might be. (4-3)

22 Undergarment for women and middling garment for men, proving the most equipped to face the foe. (7)

23 and **3** A dangerous cry for the cyclist to his mother, since a wild one may end up extremely at a loss. (4,2,2,5)

25 It should not exceed your grasp, they say. (5)

27 See 4

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2957

		A	P	O	S	T	R	O	P	H	E	S		
	F		T		A		O		U		S		A	
S	E	R	A	G	L	I	O		T	A	T	T	L	E
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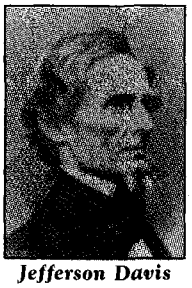
Confederate Half Dollar Stolen from President Sells for $632,000.00

Richmond, VA.—Headlines were made recently when a mysterious 1861 silver U.S. half dollar bearing the seal of the Confederacy sold at public auction for the incredible sum of $632,500.00. Experts have learned it is just one of four coins produced after the United States Mint in New Orleans was seized by rebels at the start of the Civil War.

Unique Coin of Both North and South

The Confederate silver half dollar is unique because it is the only coin to have the images of both North and South on one coin. One side has the United States design of Miss Liberty, while the other side has a Confederate States shield and the legend: "Confederate States of America".



Jefferson Davis

One of the coins was given to the President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. He carried it in his pocket as a personal "good luck" piece.

In honor of this discovery, the First Federal Mint has released a pure .999 silver Proof, die-struck in deep dimension just like the coin minted for President Jefferson Davis. The issue price is $50.00, but for a limited time only you may acquire it at the Advance Release price of $29.50.

Mint Ransacked by General "Beast" Butler

Union General Benjamin "Beast" Butler recaptured the New Orleans Mint from the Rebels in 1862. The "Beast" earned his nickname for his ruthless reign as military governor of New Orleans.

General Benjamin "Beast" Butler

Panicked Confederate Mint officials had already loaded up all of the bullion from the New Orleans Mint and shipped it up the Mississippi to avoid plunder. Thus did the dream of a Confederate coinage come to an end.

Stolen, Then Vanished

In 1865 Federal troops captured President Davis in Georgia. Davis hid his beloved "lucky coin" in his belongings when he was sent to Fort Monroe, Virginia. "Beast" Butler commanded the fort. When one of Butler's officers searched Davis' possessions, the precious coin was stolen. It disappeared for many years; the hands it passed through are a mystery to this day. The reappearance and sale of this legendary coin for $632,000.00 made headlines in the collecting world.

Actual size is 30.6 mm

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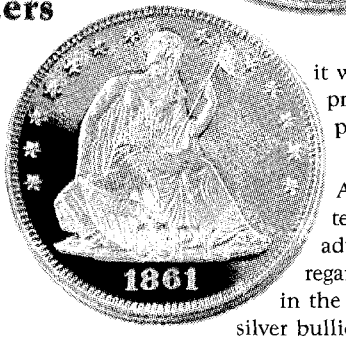

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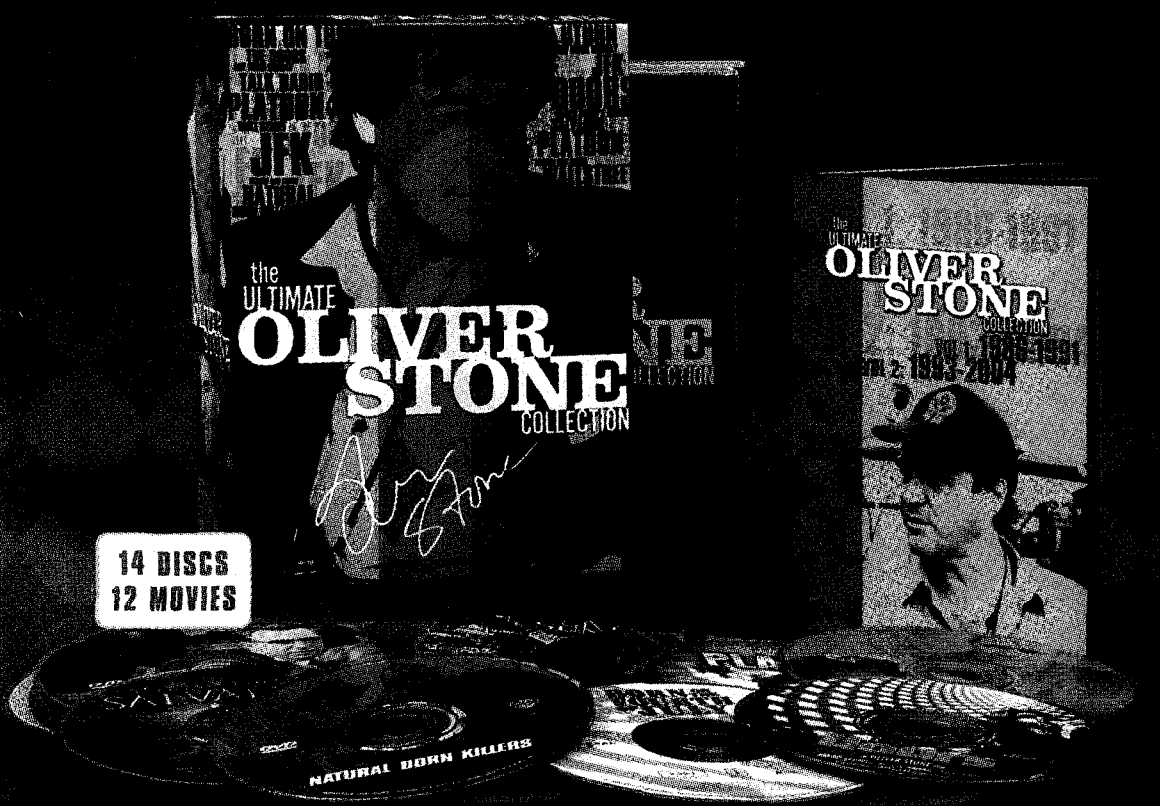

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